

SURREAL GROTESQUE

ISSUE VIII



APOCALYPSE

**THIS IS THE WAY THE WORLD ENDS
THIS IS THE WAY THE WORLD ENDS
THIS IS THE WAY THE WORLD ENDS
NOT WITH A BANG OR A WHIMPER
BUT WITH AN INVISIBLE VIRUS.**

**ONE SNEEZE AT AN AIRPORT AND 99.9% OF THE POPULATION
IS GONE. THE SIGNS WILL COME IN THE FORM OF CELEBRITY
OMENS AND CAT FOOD COMMERCIALS
AND BRITNEY SPEARS' CUNT WILL START TO SPEAK IN
TONGUES, CONGRESS WILL VOTE ON
CANNIBALISM AND EUTHANASIA FOR THE HOMELESS
PREACHERS WILL SODOMIZE ALTAR BOYS WITH GOLDEN
CROSSES AND THE POPE WILL DECLARE IT NOT A SIN
MCDONALDS WILL OFFER CRYSTAL METH ABORTIONS
AND HOLLYWOOD WILL REMAKE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS
STARRING LINDSAY LOHAN AND CHANNING TATUM
WITH A DIGITALLY ENHANCED GOD ONLY IN 3D AND JESUS
APPEARS AFTER THE CREDITS ROLL.
THE REVOLUTION WILL BE DIGITIZED
A BLACK CLOUD WILL EMERGE
THE FOUR HORSEMEN WILL BE WEARING PRADA AND THE APOCALYPSE WILL BE
SPONSORED BY STARBUCKS, COCA COLA, DISNEY, MICROSOFT, ABERCROMBIE &
FITCH, NIKE & NESTLE WHILE THE RICH WILL BE FLOATING IN SPACE
TALKING TO ALIENS AND BILL GATES ON SPEAKER PHONE WHILE THE POOR WILL
REMAIN ON EARTH AND ENJOY THEIR ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE.**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Nothing but Wastes by Will Proulx.....	7
Interview with a Horror Writer: Richard Thomas.....	11
Lollipop Chainsaw: A review by Courtney Alsop.....	17
Death Row by Chris Deal.....	19
A Short History of the Apocalypse in Literature by Joseph J. Patchen.....	25
The Paradigm Shift by Carter Rydyr.....	31
Last Man on Earth by Art Griswold.....	37
Last Man on Earth Contest Story by Cristina Jones.....	41
Exquisite corpses: An introduction to gothic and industrial music by L.V. Kramhoeft.....	42
A Mother's Love by O.D. Hegre.....	49
The Art of the Domestic Grotesque: An Interview with Caleb J. Ross.....	55
Dark Odyssey: A Tale of the Slenderman.....	60
Apocalypse by Jeanine.....	69
A fair trade by Carolyn Charron.....	71
Sliver by A.E. Doyle.....	75

Cerebral Psychosis by Elle Gottzi.....	78
Other by Lai Ann.....	85
The Cock of the Pistol by Tim Tobin.....	93
Tall Tales with Short Cocks:	
A review by Garrett Davis.....	95
Dead Ringers by Max Scratchmann.....	97
Doctor Tragedy by Jeremy Maddux.....	101
Bound by Jade: a review by Courtney Alsop.....	107
Lamia Key.....	108
On my way to Yucca Mountain!	
By Joshua Ryan.....	113
Perfection by Kela Lewis Morin.....	119
The Hospital for Dying Gods by Daniel W. Gonzales.....	121
Snow Baby by Joseph J. Patchen.....	129
Fans, Contributors and Freaks.....	133
The Waiting Room by Nathan Wunner.....	135
Special Thanks and Credits.....	139
The Evil that Men Do, Part 7.....	143
Everyone Loves a Zombie Apocalypse.....	151
Jim and Me by Rebecca Gomerueda.....	155
Surreal Grotesque in 2013.....	157

Have a safe and psychotic holiday season and see you in 2013!



NOTHING BUT WASTES

WILL BROULX

There were two slight, yet terribly ominous, sounds as I doubled back and tore through the remains of the metro like a bat out of hell:

One, tap tap tap. The echoes of my boots through the empty tunnels.

And then the, shh shh shh close behind those boots, the sound of pale dead flesh giving chase to its prey.

I feared that noise, the one that wasn't my boots; the noise that permeated every ounce of my being, even down to the sweat dripping from my pores. The grim sound of death running to me, barely audible, yet familiar.

I'd done this before. Many, many times.

There were far worse things in the wastes than gangs and food shortages. Namely, what mass graves radiation had crept its way into, licking the rotting flesh. It does terrible things to the living, that radiation. What it does to the deceased is far worse.

But, like many times before, I thought I'd seen it all. Clearly, once again, I was very wrong.

Radiation had come to this thing, and practically stuffed itself inside it. It was a huge, sluggish ball of flesh, complete with a skin of buzzing flies. It wreaked, a stench foul enough to burn skin off the living.

For what it lacked in visible extra-sensory appendages, it made up for in sheer volatile appearance and weight. It was big, yes, give or take ten or fifteen meters long and roughly five meters tall. But it was BIG.

A giant pale-white maggot, feeding off raw sewage and trash. Even the taste of fecal matter was no match for its stomach.

It was big, fat and slow. But I was running out of places to run. Clearly, my pistol had done little to nothing to even scratch the giant lard of fat.

"Viktor!", the voice inside me screeched. "Feed!"

Feed. Feed? Feed...

...yes... feed.

No, no... I couldn't. As much as I needed to, to live... to repay the debt, I couldn't. Even with everything that was happening, I hated to commit the sin. There had to be another way...

"VIKTOR!", he screamed again, except this time, in my mother's voice. "FEED!"

Ah... he knew I despised that woman. The one thing that made me happy in this god-forsaken wasteland... dearest mother's silent descent into maddening hell... with a 'tragic' end of swallowing a bottle full of cyanide...

...that whore didn't even leave a pill for me.

But, after her body went limp, quiet and gray... oh-ho, afterwards... that's when he came to me.

He promised a lot of things, the voice in my head, none of which he's given to me. His persistent and naggy demeanor is enough to drive a man right off the deep end. But I took his word, not because I believed him, but because I had nothing else.

I was desperate. Everyone was... even him.

But, oh, dearest Mother... your blood was so... so good. The only thing you were evergood for... was the crimson red fluids emitting from the lacerations I'd always wanted to cut into you... Still warm, the effects of post-mortem decay hadn't touched your flesh...

...that was the first time I'd ever fed. One soul gained. Plenty more was needed to fill my end of the debt... so much more feeding to do...

"Viktor!" the voice bellowed.

"I know!" I hollered back. "I'm feeding!"

I could feel the molt flesh and stale blood between my teeth. The slug had no soul, but the taste was refreshing... almost relaxing.

"VIKTOR!"

"WHAT!?"

Grasping her fore-head, a trickle of blood sliding down her cheek, Marsha wrapped her free arm around my neck and chest and pulled me away from the mess. The slug had been reduced to no more than a pile of goop, practically steaming in the early-winter frost.

I never remembered feeding... ever. Just came to in front of a scene from an old, cheesy horror film. Confused, yet oddly satisfied... soul or no soul gained.

"Ooh", the voice chuckled. "Seems like you got some explaining to do..."

"...what... what are you doing...?" she asked, her voice almost a whisper, and quivering.

I looked around me. The bloodied floor, her dirtied face, glistening tear-filled eyes... I didn't know what to say. I leaned my head back against her chest, as we just lay there, and apologized.

For everything. The scene I had just caused. For the past. And probably for what was to come. "I'm sorry" was the only meaningful phrase I could utter. We'd been through so much... but I never wanted to tell her about what I was capable of doing.

The night crawled in soon after, bringing harsh snowy winds and bitter cold. But, we didn't move. Marsha didn't get up to gather sticks and firewood. I didn't rummage around to find useful materials. We just lay on the hard concrete floor, in utter silence.

Her heart beat and breath, as well as mine, soothed my restless mind and like a gentle rocking, seduced me to sleep. Sleep I needed.

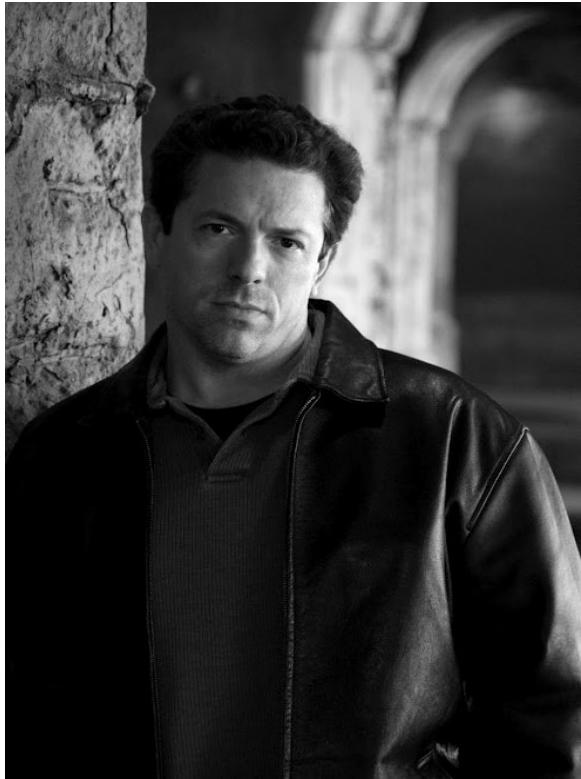
I just hope that when I awoke, she'd still be there.



Vulture '12



INTERVIEW WITH A HORROR WRITER



Surreal Grotesque: You seem to have a fairly successful career as a horror writer. You seem very dedicated to the craft, what is your work schedule like when it comes to writing? Are there any special rituals you must do?

Richard Thomas: It's tricky, you just try to find the time where you can. For my first book *Transubstantiate* I wrote every day on my lunch hour, about 700-1,000 words. It worked out really well, as I ended up writing seven first person POVs, so Monday would be Jacob, Tuesday Marcy, etc. For my second book, *Disintegration*, I took large chunks of time, usually a whole Saturday and just wrote as much as I could, usually 5,000-9,000 words. I wrote half of the book in one week, I had some time off between freelance gigs, about 40,000 words. It's really just whatever works for you. Find a time, a place and plug in. I don't have any special rituals, but there are a few books I pick up if I get stuck and can't find my voice. *Kiss Me Judas* by Will Christopher Baer is one of them.

SG: Some people measure success on their "googability". I googled you and a lot of stuff came up. You have a great online presence. How long have you been writing and what projects or stories have you been most proud of?

RT: Thanks. Seriously writing about five years. I took a chance and signed up for the Craig Clevenger class at The Cult and when he said I had talent, I just started to believe in myself. But I have good days and bad days. As for the projects I'm most proud of, obviously the novels: *Transubstantiate*, my first, which is kind of *Lost* meets *The Truman Show*, and my second, *Disintegration*, which is *Dexter* meets *Falling Down*. My agent is currently shopping *Disintegration*, and I'm keeping my fingers crossed. The stories, well, probably the contest winners like "Maker of Flight" at ChiZine, as well as the Pushcart nominations, like "Twenty Reasons to Stay and One to Leave." I'm also really excited about my first novella that I wrote, which is in a collection tentatively titled *Four Corners*, with Nik Korpon, Caleb J. Ross, and Axel Taiari. My agent is shopping that one, too. I also have a soft spot for "Victimized" as it's the longest short story I've written.

SG: Who are some of your favorite horror authors?

RT: Well, I grew up with Stephen King, so he's always been my favorite. I like the early Dean Koontz, much of Clive Barker, and a lot of Peter Straub as well. I also love *I Am Legend* by Richard Matheson, *Swan Song* by Robert McCammon and anything Stephen Graham Jones writes.

SG: In a world of horror novels about vampires and werewolves, what do you think it takes to stand out?

RT: I think you have to find a new take on it. I wrote a story called “Transmogrify” that was a modern day vampire that fed on negative energy. And of course, just apply the same standards and concepts that you would to any great story: a strong narrative hook, a conflict, characters with depth and emotion, stories that speak to great truths and honesty, and an ending that really resonates.

SG: What current projects are you working on? Do you find more freedom in writing short stories rather than novels?

RT: Mostly I’m just competing in WAR2 at Lit Reactor, while trying to rewrite Transubstantiate as a third-person YA titles. I’m always shopping stories, I have five that are being sent around right now, mostly from my MFA thesis. I just had a story, “Flowers For Jessica” come out in Weird Fiction Review #3 (Centipede Press) and I’m supposed to have a collection of horror stories coming out with Kraken Press, titled Staring Into the Abyss, hopefully this year still.

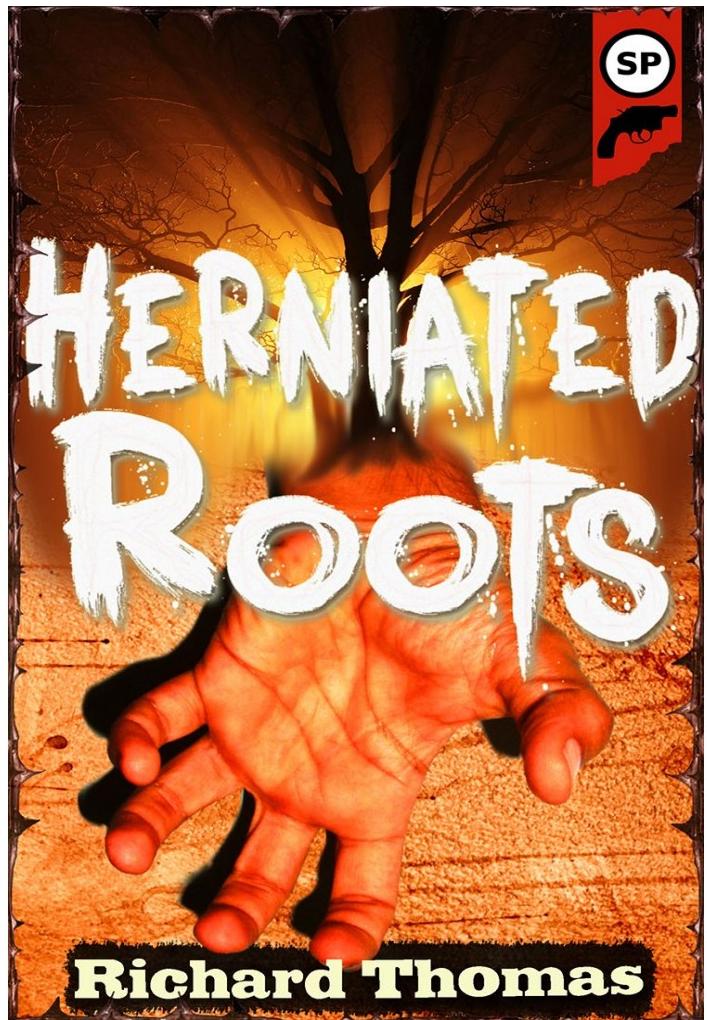
SG: The online writer’s communities can be very cliquish, how much do you think social networking figures into being successful these days? Should people be friends with other writers, try to inspire each other or do you think writing is meant to be a solitary task?

RT: That’s true, but you can probably say that about anything. I do think it’s important to have a support network, and if you can align yourself with a group of intelligent, motivated, and generous peers, that’s always a good thing. Definitely reach out and become a part of the community. I’ve met so many wonderful people that way, at AWP, The Cult, Lit Reactor, The Velvet Cemetery Dance, etc., and I’ve also discovered some fantastic voices that I know I’d never have heard of if I didn’t put myself out there.

SG: How much of your writing comes from a personal place of pain?

RT: Um, all of it? I think everything we write comes from ourselves—our experiences, our hopes and fears, everything that matters to us. I try to tap into that whenever I write. I mean, why bother if the stories you’re telling don’t make you uncomfortable, make you sweat a bit, really ask the big questions: who are we, why do we do these things, and what motivates us. Love and hate, hope and fear, greed and peace, it’s all intertwined. I like to see what happens in the shadows, what happens when we are tested, pushing into a corner, and have to fight for the things we believe in, and reveal our true character.

Thank you for taking the time!



The Artist as a Young Sociopath







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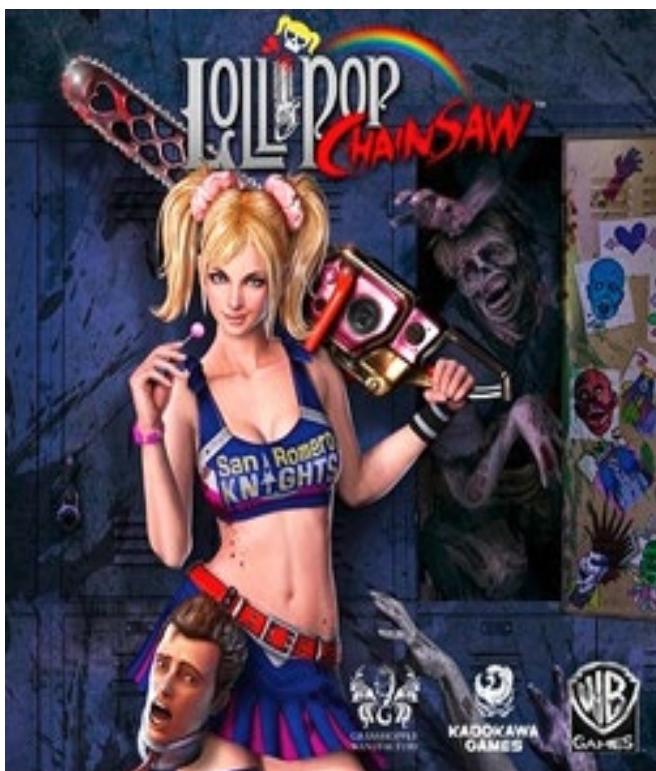
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LOLLIPOP CHAINSAW-

A REVIEW BY COURTNEY ALSOP



Have you ever wanted the world to end with a zombie apocalypse just so you could rip through hoards of zombies with a chainsaw? Of course you have. Do you like watching scantily clad cheerleaders run around? *Lollipop Chainsaw* has it all and more.

It's Juliet Starling's birthday, and of course, zombies are attacking the school. But that's ok. Juliette has a chainsaw almost as big as she is in her bag. The head hooked on Juliet's side? That's what left of her boyfriend, Nick. Along with her family, her job is to hunt down the zombies and stop the cause of the undead uprising. The player can use her pom-poms to stun enemies and her chainsaw to finish them off. Along the way you'll hear some ridiculously foul and funny language, including "Zombies suck dick at driving!" and "Don't be racist against cows, Nick!"

I did not think I would enjoy *Lollipop Chainsaw* as much as I did. As I started the game, I constantly questioned my hearing at the comments and one-liners. Can

it really be that over-the-top foul? Yes. And it is not that the game only has its moments. The whole thing is, and is meant to be, over-the-top. Juliette slays zombie firemen, football players, and teachers in flourishes of rainbows and sparkles. And she's just so damn happy to do it.

Sure, the story is not particularly original, but it does have a story and a reason why there are zombies. The main point is still killing zombies. This is an action hack and slash game, and it's not parading as something else. You collect coins and upgrade yourself, your weapons, or get new combos. Or buy new clothes. On the way you meet Juliet's family and partake in some boss battles that are fun and creative. Yes, there is some perversion going on that is supposed to be funny. But I argue that it is less offensive than twenty minutes of *Jersey Shore*, and at least Juliet is badass.

The game clearly is "go big or go home." It has been a long time since I've played a game with a smile on my face the whole time. Also, I found it eerily addicting. Must be because the whole thing is coated in sugar and "awesome". My only complaint is that the camera does not always cooperate and walls or other obstacles get in the way of your view, taking away from the fast pace of the game play. Overall, if you want a fun, fast pace, hack and slash adventure, with a foul-mouthed cheerleader, I cannot recommend this enough.



OJEL
ENA
2011

DEATH ROW

BY CHRIS DEAL

When I heard the doors at the end of the corridor open, Tommy Sing was snoring in the cell next to me, Mike Roth was down in the day room watching the news, and Benjamin Yates was reading from his worn out Bible. I was mirroring Yates, but with Dostoevsky instead of the Good Book. A chorus of footsteps smacking against the polished cement floor came down the hall and stopped right across from me. Warden James walked in front a little man carrying a small box. The two biggest guards Central Penitentiary could spare, Earl Douglas and Bob Metzger flanked the little fellow. Douglas was a brutal man who would be home here on Death Row, but Metzger always did all right the other prisoners and me.

This time of day, the cell doors weren't locked. The Warden slid open the door across from mine and stood to the side as Douglas pushed the inmate inside, where the little man

dropped his box of possessions and fell to the floor. Metzger flashed a grimace my way, but the Warden acted as if he didn't see it. "William Lawrence, welcome to your home for the remainder of your stay."

"Cozy," Lawrence replied as he stood. His hair was thin and greasy.

"They always say that," Douglas said.

"I'll bet." His eyes took in everything at once, every inch of the cell.

"From 7 a.m. until 11 p.m. you have the ability to use the day room. You have one hour a day where you can either use the exercise room or the showers. The guards will escort you and the rest of the inmates here on Death Row to the dining hall once the rest of the inmates here have had their fill. Once a week, you have the opportunity to the outdoor exercise fields for two hours at a time, weather permitting.

"You will notice your cell is nice and clean. We expect you to maintain that. You have the opportunity to leave the cell block and work in the canteen or clothes house, and if you decide to do so, you can earn money to make your stay here a bit more hospitable. If you so much as step out of line once, you will be sent to the segregated block, where you will find the cells quite a bit smaller than the one you will now call your home. There, you are allowed to leave your cell for but one hour a week until such a time as we believe you will behave yourself. Are we clear?"

"That we are, sir."

"Good. CO Metzger here will be one of your regular guards, and I'm sure you will meet CO Thompkins soon. I don't believe you'll see much of me until we start preparations for your execution, when, or I should say, if that comes to take place. You can expect this cell to be your home for quite a while."

Lawrence nodded, and Douglas escorted Warden James from the block. Metzger stayed at the entrance to the cell. "Don't worry about Douglas. He rarely comes around these parts. Get settled in, lunch is in an hour." Lawrence said nothing, and Douglas turned towards the control center, where two guards watch us 24 hours. He stopped at my door, however.

"Doyle, why don't you help Lawrence get situated."

"Will do, sir," I said. He nodded and left. I saved my place in the book and went to the door. Sing was still snor-

ing and Yates was at his writing table, still reading. I could hear the television from the day room as Roth was hard of hearing.

Lawrence was sitting on the edge of his bunk, his eyes steady on a blank section of the wall. "I'd avoid boredom, were I you."

"Yeah," he said, shifting his glance towards me. Lawrence looked like a sewer rat, his movements twitchy and his skin pale.

"They bring a trolley from the library through a few times a week. Might as well do some reading with your time."

"There aren't any windows here."

"Nah. Us here on Death Row don't get much sun. Nothing but yellow fluorescence."

"You ever miss it? The sun?" His eyes were dark and he wouldn't break contact. I'd long since given up the macho attitude they say you need to keep up to survive inside. All I had to look forward too was a final meal and a few injections, so I guess I saw no need for it. I looked into Sing's cell, where he lay on his side facing the wall. The man had gotten fat from ten years of Death Row life and had a bad case of sleep apnea. His snoring gave way to a hacking gulp. He unconsciously scratched his ass.

"Sometimes," I said.

Lawrence stayed in his cell most of the day, leaving only for lunch and dinner. As the hours flowed towards lights out, Yates, Roth, Sing, and I gathered at a table in the day room for a game of Hold 'Em, our nightly ritual. I asked Lawrence if he wanted to join but the man said he was tired. Sing was a poor dealer and took too long to shuffle. Yates had the biggest pile of cigarettes from the triple queens he drew the last hand.

"What're you thinking of the new guy?" Roth asked as I checked out my cards. Nothing of note.

"Fold," I said, sliding my cards back to Sing. "Seems quiet. Didn't get a chance to find out what he did yet."

"Who knows?" Yates said. "Folk are fucked up these days. Check." The reporters and police liked to call Yates a serial killer. With seven bodies behind him, I tended to agree with the sentiment.

"Looks like he couldn't kill a dog," Sing said. "Raise one smoke." Tommy Sing was there for an armed robbery. He killed one cop and paralyzed another.

"Raise another," Roth said. "Figure by the looks of him he's got a thing for kids." Roth would know.

"Probably," Yates said. "Think he'll own up to it? Call." He pushed two smokes forward.

Sing called, and laid down the flop. Two and four of hearts, eight of clubs.

"Don't see why he wouldn't," I said. "There aren't any Aryans here. He'd be mostly safe."

When the night watch, CO Ramirez, told us to head back to our cells, I still had a pack of smokes. Yates ended up winning two off of the others. Lawrence was sitting on his bunk with his back against the wall when we got into our cells. He was watching us, especially Roth. The doors slid shut and locked up tight. Death Row hadn't been upgraded beyond the day room, and our doors were still made of old fashioned iron bars.

They never turn the lights completely off around here, and you can generally see well enough to read. I sat on the bunk and opened the book, taking up where I had stopped when Lawrence came in.

"So, what'd you do to wind up here?" Yates asked the new.

"They say I raped and murdered a couple girls," Lawrence replied after a few moments.

"Bullshit," Roth said from the cell beside Lawrence.

"Excuse me?" Lawrence said, standing from his bunk and walking to the front of his cell. He put his hands on the bars and his face between them. He looked small enough that his head could slide through.

"You're surrounded by murderers. You were convicted and are spending your life behind bars until they stick a needle in your arm. Might as well tell us you did it and forget that whole innocence dance."

"Yeah, I did it. Convicted of two, suspected of more."

"How many did you do?" Yates asked. Sing had already started snoring on the other side of the wall.

"More than I was suspected of."

"You going to try and parlay that into a stay of execution or something?" Roth asked.

"No."

I read Dostoyevsky's The House of the Dead until sometime after midnight when I dozed off thinking of my upcoming execution. Two decades gone in this cell and part of me was looking forward to those needles. Last time I spoke with my lawyer, I asked him stop sending in appeals. Time to let things be, I told him. They'll pump me full of sodium thiopental first, to knock me out, make the rest easier. The pancuronium they give me next, it'll paralyze me to the point I won't even be able to breathe. Lastly, it's the potassium chloride, which will give me a nice case of cardiac arrest. Should take less than ten minutes and I'm gone, bye-bye Doyle, you murdering bastard.

It was a little later when something changed in the air, something different that roused me. My legs were restless and I didn't want to stay in bed. On my feet, I went to the bars and looked down at the control center, where behind bulletproof glass I could see Ramirez and the other CO talking. The whole area was quiet. The rhythmic breathing of Roth and Yates and the buzzing of the lights overhead were the only sounds to be heard. There could be a riot in the general population and we wouldn't hear a sound. It felt wrong, like the death we were all waiting for had come sooner than it was meant to.

Sing wasn't making a noise. He hadn't been this quiet since they moved him in here. Moving closer to his cell, I whispered, "Tommy, you up?"

No response. There was a twitch of movement out of the corner of my eye. Lawrence was awake, sitting up in his bed. For a moment, it looked like his eyes were glowing, luminescent. A trick of the brain.

"Tommy," I said, louder. Roth was still asleep, but Yates started moving in his bunk. Lawrence was still as stone. "Tommy."

"Doyle, what's going on?" Ramirez yelled from the control center.

"Don't know. Something feels off," I said.

"Shit, Doyle, it's late," Yates said.

"Shut the fuck up. Lawrence, can you see Tommy?" I asked.

"He ain't moving."

"Ramirez, can you check on Tommy?"

“Sure, why not? Want me to go out for some ice cream, too?”

“Just do this one thing then you can go spend the rest of the night jerking off for all I care.”

“As long as you watch,” he said as he came past my cell. I watched as he looked into Tommy’s cell, shining a flashlight inside.

“Mother of God,” he said, his voice a whimper. “Green, open Sing’s cell and call the doctor.”

“What happened?” The lock in the Sing’s door clicked open and Ramirez ran inside. “What the fuck happened?”

Ramirez walked out, his hands covered in blood and tears flowing down his face

“Worst damned thing I ever saw,” Yates said at breakfast. The dining hall looked like any high school cafeteria, only with guards patrolling the tables.

“I don’t quite believe you,” I said.

“It’s like he clawed his own damn throat open. Why the hell would he do that?” Roth asked. Death Row ate segregated from the rest of the inmate population, so we had the whole place to ourselves.

“Don’t feel right,” I said. “I couldn’t see Tommy killing himself.

“The fat fuck was too much of a pussy for it,” Yates said.

Lawrence didn’t join us. When the guard told him to line up at the end of the Row, he said he didn’t want to eat.

“I think the new guy watched him do it,” I said.

“Lawrence is more of a pussy than Sing was. He could have shouted or something.”

“The fucker was awake. I’m sure of it.”

“Well, ask him,” Roth said. “I liked Tommy. If Lawrence could have saved him, me and him might have to have us some words.”

“Don’t do nothing stupid,” I said. “You know Douglas works the segregated block.”

“I ain’t scared of that Nazi piece of shit.”

After breakfast, I went to work in the canteen until lunch. Lawrence still didn’t join us. Yates was laughing like a boozehound when I got there. “Doyle,” he said, “you missed it. Fucking classic.”

“Shut up,” Roth said. His face was blood red.

“What happened?”

“Roth cornered Lawrence in his cell, started asking all these questions. Then Lawrence said something to him and Roth all but pissed himself.”

“I said ‘shut the fuck up.’”

“What’d he say? Did he see Tommy do it?”

"I don't want to talk about it."

Things passed as they always do after that. I spent my hour in the showers, enjoying the warm water washing over me, then went back to my cell and read. Roth was pouting in his cell while Yates and Lawrence were watching the news. I finished up Dostoyevsky and started on some Tolstoy. *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* would keep me until the library cart came back through.

None of us wanted to play cards that night. Didn't seem like. I stayed in my cell until lights out. Lying on my bunk, I couldn't stop running over last night in my head. Tommy wasn't a good man, but for lack of better prospects he was my friend. I was here before him, but he seemed to take to prison life well enough. He was remorseful, always said he hated what it was he did. There was something off inside of him, and he wished he could have known what it was like to live without it. With nothing but time and the shadow of your impending death before you, all you can do is remember what brought you here. Most of the people I've met here, no matter how defiant they are when they walk in, when they start that walk to the grave, they're changed. Sorry at their deeds, at how they couldn't leave the world a better place.

A grunt broke me off from my thoughts, and a slurping sound. I got up from my bunk and went to the bars. The block was quiet except for that weird sound. During my brief time in general population, you'd hear that most nights. Normally the Aryans having their way with cellmates whom couldn't find a place in a gang. This was different, though. I'll admit, the oddness is what kept me from noticing something stranger. Lawrence wasn't in his cell.

I breathed in to call to the guards when I heard a shush coming from Roth's cell. Lawrence came to the bars. The doors were locked and I couldn't think of how he got there.

There was a smear of blood across his lips, dribbling down his chin.

"The fuck?" was all I could say.

"I was hungry," Lawrence said. "Don't worry, though, he's still alive. He'll be a little slow tomorrow, but he'll be fine."

He pressed himself against the bars and his body contorted, stretched itself out as he passed through. "I can't go about killing you all if I want to keep a steady supply, you know."

He stood in front of my cell, licking at his blood fingers.

"Don't you worry, though. I'll be getting to you soon enough. And if you're nice, I might even turn you."

Roth came to the bars of his cell, a streak of blood on his neck. He looked at me and smiled. Through needles or teeth, I wasn't long for the cellblock.



A SHORT HISTORY OF THE APOCALYPSE IN LITERATURE

JOSEPH J. PATCHEN

WARNING. By the time you read this, the world as we know it may have already ended. I wish you good luck with the zombies, or the pandemic, or the nuclear winter, or the radiation, or maybe the giant cockroaches. I wish you luck with being alone or in that group led by the psychotic guy who screams into dead telephones, claiming they rang. But hey, at least there will be Twinkies. However, if the Mayans are incorrect: Happy December 22nd !

So, in terms of literature, how did we reach this apocalyptic pinnacle?

Apocalyptic Literature (A.L.), or as literary scholars refer to it, “prophetic writing” is as old as time. It seems that since the moment man slid out of the primordial ooze and towed off, he has contemplated his end. Every ancient culture’s religion sandwiched their teachings and practices between a creation story and an end of the world tale. Famous teachings such as The Epic of Gilgamesh, circa 2000-1500 BC, and Noah and the Ark stand out for both their popularity and similarity , as each tells of a great flood that ends and cleanses the world in the name of God.

This thematic marriage of religion and apocalypse appears to have been sacrosanct for a few thousand years.

That is, until 1826 when an unlikely hand grabbed the apocalypse and presented it purely as art. Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley followed up her game changing novel, “Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus”, with the first modern apocalyptic novel, the aptly titled, “The Last Man”. Set in the last decade of the twenty first century, we follow Lionel Verney, an orphan, and inevitably the only healthy soul in a world being slowly exterminated by a plague.

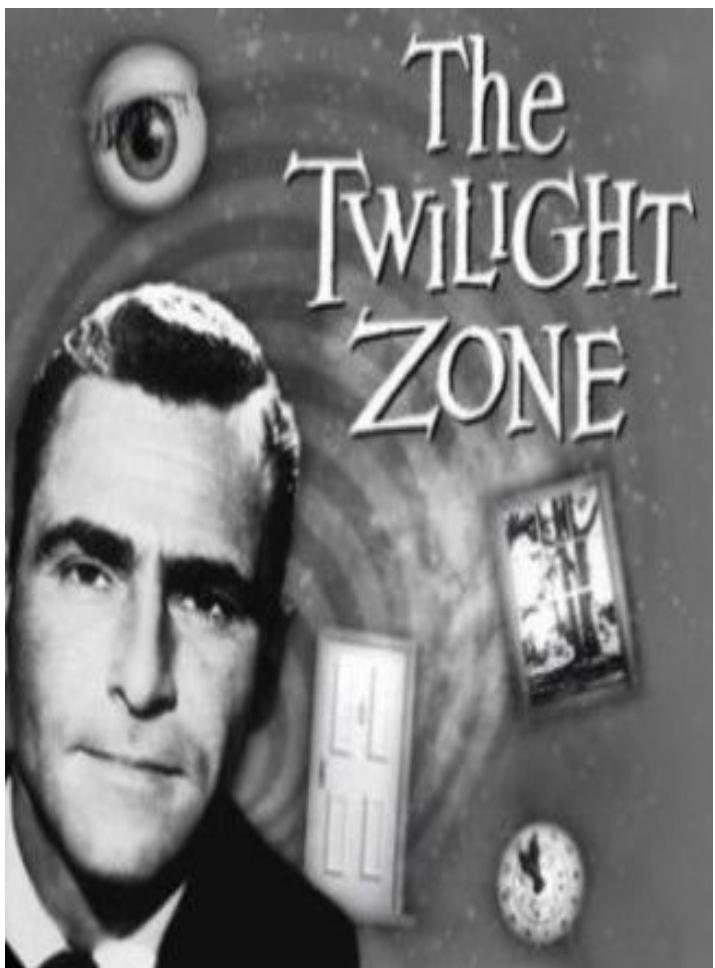
Note Shelley’s use of a plague as a biblical holdover. What was groundbreaking here are the themes of isolation, the struggle for survival, and the very nature of man turning against his fellow man as civilization breaks down. These are played out against a larger plotline of man’s extinction. This story laid the blueprint for such future classics as Richard Matheson’s “I Am Legend”, Stephen King’s “The Stand” and the ever popular comic and AMC’s television series, “The Walking Dead”.

Unfortunately, overshadowed by the popularity of “Frankenstein”, the balance of Shelley’s works including “The Last Man” slipped away into anonymity until the 1960s.

In December of 1839 ‘Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine’ published Edgar Allan Poe’s short story,

“The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion”. This is a post-apocalyptic romp as everyone in the story is already dead: Eiros is freshly gone and the less loquacious Charmion has passed some ten years earlier. During the conversation between the two spirits, Eiros explains his death and the apocalypse to his new found friend. Their world ended, according to Poe, when a comet streaking towards the earth removed all nitrogen from the atmosphere leaving only pure oxygen to ignite and swallow all below in a hellacious inferno.

Scholars today believe that Poe wrote this story as a response to the 1830s rise of William Miller, a Baptist preacher and founder of the Advent Church. Miller and his followers, the Millerites, (Yes, Millerites – it was



hard to be witty and urbane when the end of the world was at hand), marked March 21, 1844 on their calendars as the end of days. This purportedly provided divine inspiration for Poe's satire.

In case you are wondering about Miller's 'end of the world' prediction: On March 22nd Miller announced to the still unscathed world that his calculations were incorrect. He then went back to his abacus, rescheduling the end for April 18, 1844 (Damn those leap years). On April 19th when Jesus Christ failed to show and didn't ring the bell for last call, Miller admitted his error though he remained steadfastly certain that the end of the world was just around the corner.

Forty six years after Poe and back across the pond, Richard Jefferies put his own spin on A.L. with the novel titled "After London" (How is that for initialed irony?). In this 1885 story we find that Mother Nature has her own redevelopment plan for reclaiming her planet from these pesky humans. Overnight all animals, including the family dog, cat and ferret, revert to their primordial feral natures; forests swallow cities and towns, suffocating roadways and crushing buildings; and all bodies of water transform into thick, murky swamps. This unnatural natural assault ultimately forces the handful of survivors to revert to a

medieval lifestyle. The tale is written as a pure action thriller and in its time, found much favor with both young and old. It also played out the very popular late Victorian literary conflict of "the natural man" versus mechanization.

But interestingly enough, the foundation for Jefferies' bell weather tale can be found in two of his short stories penned years earlier during the 1870s. Both of those stories built man's demise around freak blizzards. The stories were found amongst his papers following his death, both untitled and unpublished to this day.

Whether Jefferies opened the door for H. G. Wells – the father or grandfather of science fiction, depending upon your age, is unknown. What is known is that "The Time Machine" in 1895 and "The War of the Worlds" in 1898 introduced wondrous machines and new, unknown, out of the realm of possibility technologies into the A.L. mix. Also introduced for the first time were space and time travel and alien beings. Wells' literary inventions blew past everything written before. No longer confined to earthly disasters and man, A.L. could expand exponentially across time and space and take any direction the writer's mind could dream up. It would be a while yet before writer's caught on to this.

Jack London's 1912 short story "The Scarlet Plague" takes us to San Francisco in the year 2072, where we see how the survivors are still struggling sixty years after the initial infection. In three short generations mankind has devolved linguistically, intellectually and technologically. Yet these hunter-gatherers still dream of power, of ruling each other, of creating gun powder to force subjugation, i.e. the structuring of a civilization. This is a moralistic apocalypse story: man, through overpopulation, caused the infection; some people will survive; civilization will be rebuilt; and will cause its own inevitable downfall again – be it with weapons or another plague. It is the cycle of life, repeated through the eons. The story harbingers back to Shelley but there is no indication that London ever read the earlier work.

Deaths from the 1918 Flu Pandemic coupled with the slaughter and mutilation of World War I made the fiction

of the Apocalypse pale in comparison. A.L. disappeared in the wake of “The Lost Generation”, social exposes and The Great Depression.

Then, ominously in 1937, Stephen Vincent Benet’s short story “By The Waters of Babylon” foretold the power of a great bomb. It is the story of a man, generations removed from war, who explores a major northeastern city decimated by a war weapon that caused “The Great Burning”.

His journey culminates in his realization that mankind can destroy itself with its own weapons.

In November of 1945 World War II perfects the killing begun in World War I. Call it a Hydrogen Bomb, a Nuclear Bomb, or an Atomic Bomb: man, for the first time in recorded history, demonstrates that the reality of an apocalypse need not come from an external force. Armed with such powerful bombs, humanity acknowledges that extinction is only a fidgety fingertip away.

In response to this new reality, literature, followed by television and cinema, reflected this paranoia. The works are prolific, the quantity astounding, but while most of it is forgettable and almost camp by today’s standards – if camp is possible, the best works of A.L. however, more

than make up for the mountains of schlock.

It is at this juncture, in response to unprecedented proliferation, that the A.L. genre developed such subcategories as zombie apocalypse, vampire apocalypse, and the “cozy catastrophe”, a term coined by writer Brian Aldiss referring to a small group of post-apocalyptic survivors who carve out a relatively acceptable existence.

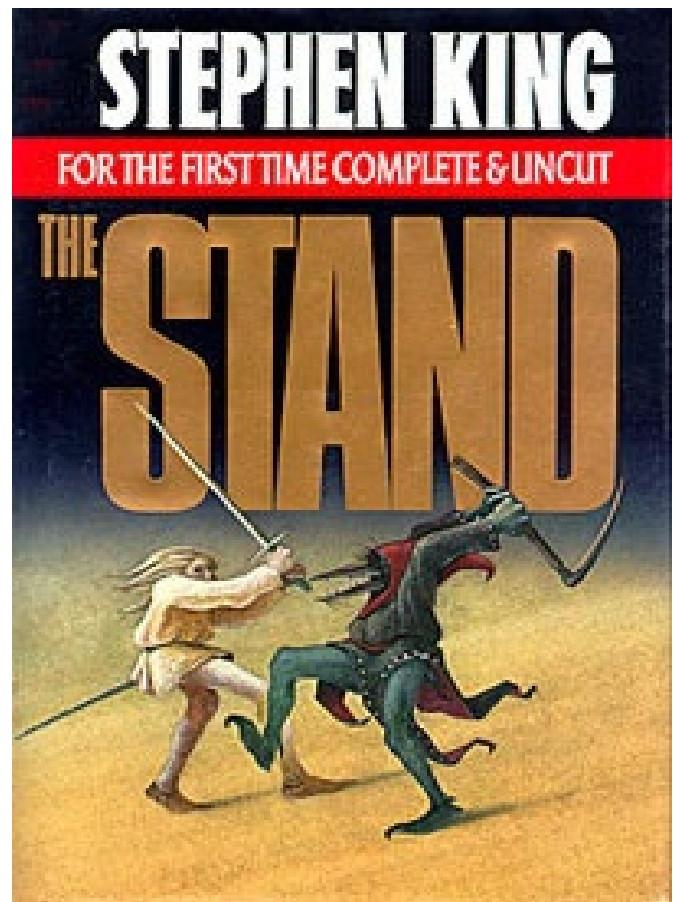
Ray Bradbury’s “The Martian Chronicles” sets its later chapters on the War God’s planet before, during and even after the atomic war on the earth below. In a wry twist, man is the vehicle for the infection that obliterates the Martian society.

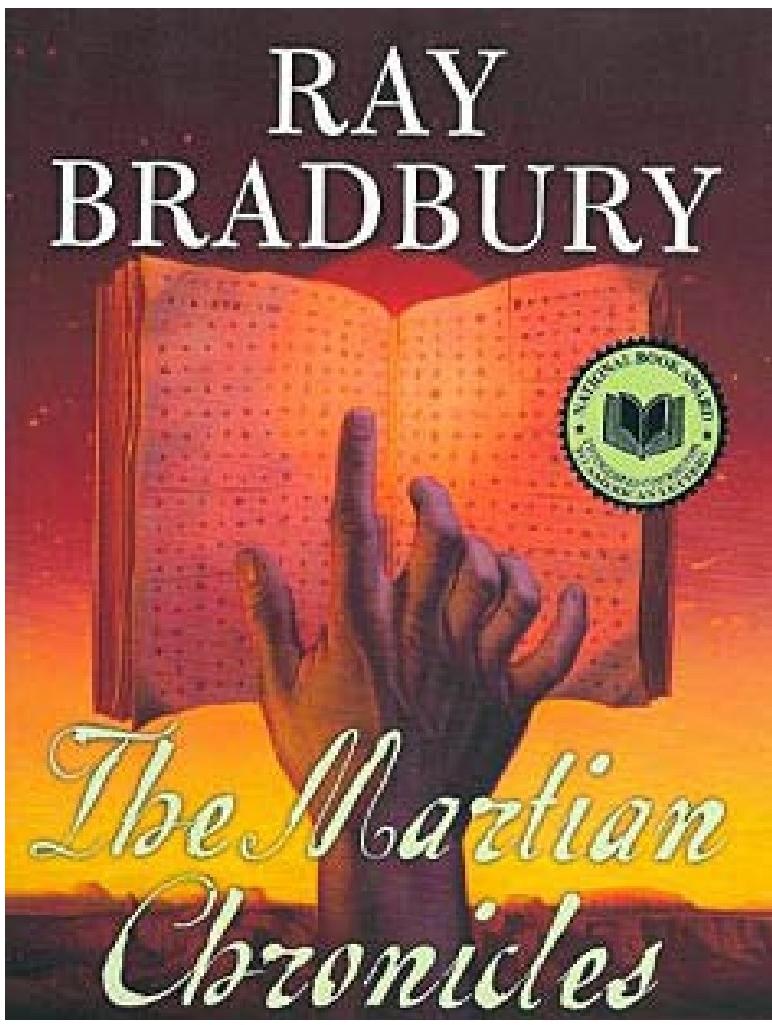
Judith Merrill’s 1950 debut novel, “Shadow on the Hearth”, gives us insight into the daily trials of a British housewife as she tries to maintain normalcy for her two children in the new post-apocalyptic order. Merrill presents us with the first A.L. heroine demonstrating her adaptive abilities, strengths and shortcomings. This was a breakthrough in A.L.: a female hero, told from a female perspective.

Richard Matheson added his own voice in a series of short stories both in print and on television via “The Twilight Zone”. His panic-stricken “Third From The Sun” space travelers, flee an impending Nuclear War in the hopes of finding an oasis of sanity in the universe. Their haven turns out to be earth, which, ironically, is in the grasp of the same deadly nuclear madness that has driven them from their own world. In this story, the very real nuclear proliferation of The Cold War has been interjected into the A.L.

Andre Norton, in 1952, delivers “Star Man’s Son”, a spin on the ‘Tales of the Round Table’ reset in a world destroyed by radiation. It offers the hope of starting over, but like the John Lennon ode to Yoko Ono, it is just not the same with the other three fellows.

We cannot overlook 1954’s “I Am Legend” by Richard Matheson. Here the pandemic is vampirism. The lone uninfected survivor copes quite well, remaining in his home, even killing scores of the infected, until his day of reckoning, when the adaptive-evolving vampires jail him on a charge of mass murder. This brought forth a





plethora of innovations: the germ theory of vampirism; the concept that the infected could adapt and evolve; the infected becoming sentient; the evolution of the infected into the new, dominant race; the infected forming a social hierarchy based on pre-apocalyptic civilization; the idea of the absolute demise of the human race.

This one book has spawned 5 films: 1964's Vincent Price vampire vehicle, "The Last Man on Earth"; George Romero's 1968 zombie epic, "Night of the Living Dead"; 1971's "The Omega Man"; 2002's "28 Days Later"; and in 2007, the Will Smith film, "I Am Legend".

John Wyndham's 1951 "Day of the Triffids" explores a new concept: a pandemic of mal-adaptive vegetation gone awry. Of note, the opening hospital scene in the TV series, The Walking Dead, eerily resembles the same opening in the "Day of the Triffids".

By 1957, Wyndham's "The Midwich Cuckoos" re-invents Wells' conquering invaders from space in a more insidious plan of infiltration through insemination. Aliens could now procreate through the human body and invade the society from within. Who needs warfare? This laid the foundation for

the now classic film trilogy, "Aliens".

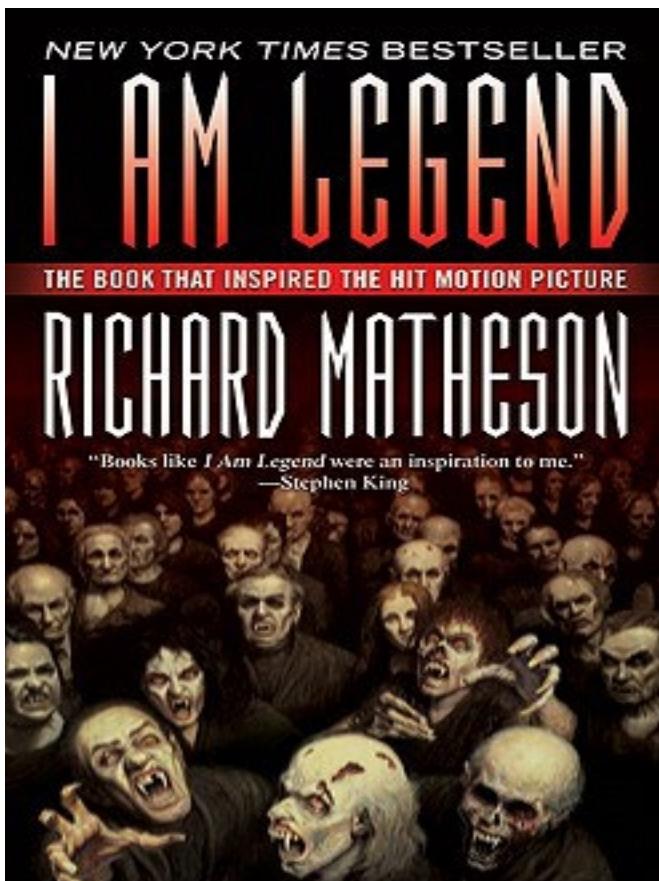
In 1959 Poul Anderson launched his 'Mauri' series which continued until 1983. This series included his multi-award winning story, "No Truce With Kings": an examination of how a society and its surviving factions compete to rebuild civilization following the war to end all wars.

While families dug their bomb shelters and children learned that hiding under their elementary school desks might save them from the blast, television shows such as "The Twilight Zone" and "Outer Limits", horror and science fiction pulps by the pound, bad B-Movies with giant bugs and pretty actresses, all exploited the nuclear theme throughout the 1950s.

As the 1950s turned into the 1960s, Robert Heinlein published "Farnham's Freehold" in 1964. Following the Cuban Missile Crisis, readers found themselves sitting in the fallout shelter for Mr. Heinlein's take on nuclear war. Remember, Godzilla was born of the bomb.

Even Star Trek and its successor shows have paid their homage to The Apocalypse in episodes featuring the Klingons to the Borg to suns going supernova and out of control space junk gobbling up every universe in its wake.

But on the night of October 1, 1968, the apocalyptic world changed. George Romero, a group of Pennsylvania townspeople and a handful of unknown actors showed us the future and the face of what defines The Apocalypse. "Night of the Living Dead" creator Romero credits Matheson's "I Am Legend" as his inspiration. Here the pandemic of undead are not vampires, but flesh eating zombies and what can I say . . . we have all been hungry for more ever since.



What is most disconcerting is that we may meet our end, not in the jaws of aliens or monsters, but by the hands of the people we know the best – our family and friends who have been resurrected from the grave. It may be your brother, or your daughter, even a neighbor or a friend. If you survive the 21st you can chew on that at your Holiday table.





DAMIEN WORM 2011

<http://damienworm.deviantart.com/>

The Paradigm Shift

By Carter Rydyl

*The last man on Earth sat in a room,
there was a knock at the door.*

Fredric Brown

On hearing the loud rapping, Albert placed his book down on the bureau, open. He had yet to read the final chapter. Opening the door he saw himself raise a shotgun, level it between his eyes and blow the top of his head off. Albert didn't see both his eyes vanish in a brilliant red flash.

The doppelganger walked over to the bureau and closed the book, *The History of Humanity*.

The last man on Earth shook off the dream as he awoke to his nightmare.

He flipped back the single, threadbare blanket and swung his legs over the side of the iron bed. Head bowed, he waited...

A pounding upon his cell door was followed by a clang of keys, locks turning and bolts sliding. The steel door flung open and slammed against the wall of the tiny cell. Filling the entrance stood Xama, Grand Mistress of the Neo-Matriarch Militia.

She wore boots of patent leather, gleaming, reflective and knee-high.

Tall and muscular, she was resplendent in her immaculate, figure-hugging uniform. Her tight skirt barely covered her crotch and her uniform jacket was adorned with the medals of many hard-fought battles of the

Gender Wars.

A peak hat with the insignia of her militia crowned Xama's head. The emblem consisted of a glorified 'V' within a bold circle and a dot sitting at the top between the V's wings; it symbolized female superiority. As far as Albert was concerned the symbol represented misandry.

Xama's hair was pulled tight across her skull and secured in a bun. Her features were cold and angular, severe cheeks and pointed chin and a sandpaper-hard face.

A riding crop tapped her thigh in a motion of agitation.

"It's time."

Immediately, two squat and burly guards, hairless but brutish-looking women, charged into the small enclosure and roughly clasped a heavy chain to the thick leather collar permanently secured around Albert's neck.

"Stand up, dog!"

Weak and anaemic, Albert attempted to obey but crumbled to the floor, unable to walk. The guards gruffly grabbed him by his arms, dragged him out of his cell and down a long corridor.

Albert offered no resistance, knew better than to provoke antagonism. His feet were testimony to his gaolers' brutality, having been reduced to misshapen stumps caused by innumerable beatings.

The group halted outside a steel door as they had done many times before.

The austere leader turned to the man, eyes narrowed to slits, thin lips curled in a cruel sneer, "It will not be long before your services will no longer be required," she assured him. "Our scientists are on the verge of a breakthrough. No longer will we require the contribution of a male donor.

"Soon, the Y chromosome will become extinct along with the misogyny and abuse inherent in all members of the male hegemony.

"Soon, we will reproduce using the DNA strands of two women -- two superior X chromosomes to produce the supreme female!"

The stern woman paused, savoured the broken wreck before her, "For too long women have been the

subset of men but once you, the last man on Mother Gaia, are dead, men will be stricken from history forever.

Xama beamed, "A new order will arise, survive and flourish, and rule in perfect harmony."

"In the meantime, you will perform your duty and continue to serve our glorious Motherland."

She opened the steel door to a massive room buzzing with the activity of scurrying dwarfish attendants. All were female but hardly human in their strange yet homogeneous deformity. Subhuman, sterile clones purposefully bred for their only duty, as were all other subgroups of the Neo-Matriarchs: genetically manipulated and bred for the sole purpose of performing specific tasks.

In the centre of the massive room lay the greatest abomination ever conceived through the misuse of science, an atrocity beyond imagination. Created in an obscure gene lab, it was the product of deranged, fanatical matriarchs obsessed with madness. Prominent scientists had been enslaved to do their bidding and create this travesty of motherhood.

The creature's existence was legendary. Albert's war buddies had shared jokes about it during the Gender Wars. They had even passed images of the creature between them, hideous, gigantic, unnameable! How they had ever obtained images of that mutated thing writhing within its hidden lair had remained a mystery to him.

Now, he was again within its den.

A giant monstrosity of malformed womanhood that reached as high as the ceiling occupied the centre of the huge room. Tiers of scaffolding surrounded her so that the freakish dwarves could reach and tend to her every need. The grotesque creature belched, hissed and squirmed as the stunted servants perpetually bustled and fretted over her.

Permanently pregnant, the mutant's abdomen throbbed and undulated with hundreds of wriggling foetuses. She gave birth daily. Squirming babies were held and cuddled by dozens of servile dwarves as they fervently suckled upon rows of udder-like teats.

Albert's vicious guards bent him over a table as a bizarre browless dome-headed woman -- a medical specialist of the militant matriarchs -- injected him with sexual stimulants using a massive syringe.

Moments later, he was placed in a harness and hauled over to the quivering orifice of the great termite-like queen. Her vulva leaked an irksome, fetid discharge. Albert retched, finding the odour that assailed his

nostrils abhorrent.

Robbed of choice and driven by stimuli over which he had no control, Albert performed his duty and endured coitus with the gigantic monstrosity.

He invited death to deliver him from his misery, wishing that the mutated scientists would hurry up and perfect their technique.

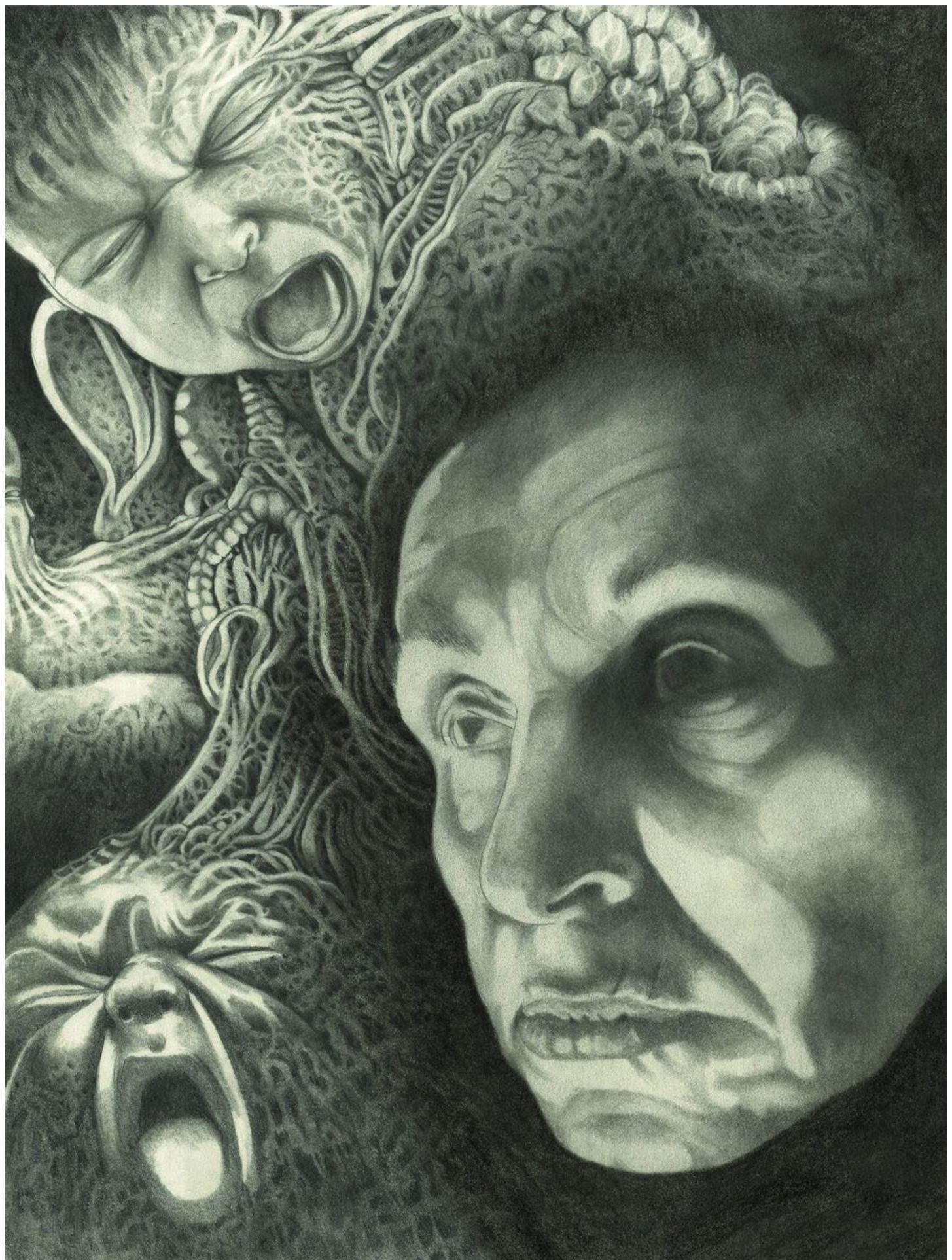
But he was thankful for the small mercy afforded him.

At least he no longer had to look at the hideous freak before him. In their zeal to eradicate the *male gaze*, his captors had scorched out his eyes.

First place winner of the "Last Man on Earth" contest!

You can check out more art and writing by Steve Carter and Antoinette Rydyr at: <http://www.weirdwildart.com/>.





Last man on Earth

Art Griswold

The last man on Earth sat in a room, there was a knock at the door. He put down the stale lemonade he'd been drinking and got up. He swayed in place for a few moments, trying to decide what to do. He knew he was all alone on the island, knew there had been no people in the area for months. How could there be someone knocking on his door?

Jim had been in a bunker when the bombs had fallen, eating popcorn and watching a porn movie. His left hand had been all buttery from the salty treat, and his right had a firm grasp on his dick. He didn't even feel the bombs drop, refused to listen to the screams and pounding at the door only moments before. He was enjoying his tiny world under the ground, safe from all things, and doing what he loved the best, eating and jacking off.

Five months later he'd run out of food and had emerged from the bunker to go in search of more supplies. After he'd filled two backpacks with food and had come back to seal back into the bunker, he'd noticed the door was closed and a wagon had been overturned out in front of the little room in the ground.

He'd turned around and lit out for the territories, never looking back. All he wanted in this end-world, all he'd ever wanted, was to be left alone. He had walked south, and eventually found a big land bound lake with several large islands scattered in the waters. He had liberated a boat from a dock, and rowed out to one of the biggest, thinking he'd camp out and live in a tent. He had discovered a cabin and had moved in.

There was no electricity, but he still had dirty magazines, and corn he popped over fires at night hidden in an enclosure he'd built out of trees. He was happy, all alone on his own island, eating popcorn and jerky while looking at naked women and pulling his pud. Then the knocking had come at his door.

He opened the door, and he thought he'd seen something flitting around the corner. He'd slammed the door and ran into the room he'd made his bedroom and hid in the closet. He was waiting for the door to open again and then he'd hear footsteps thudding across the floor, searching for him. The shaking didn't stop for a good hour, and even then, he hadn't been able to come out of the closet for a few hours after that.

Finally, he'd forced himself to get up and come out, it was his island and he'd be damned if anything was going to make him hide in terror. He'd gathered a snack and his walking stick and set out to look for the person who had knocked on his door. After an hour's worth of tromping, he was back at his kitchen table.

Having found nobody, he wondered if he'd even truly heard the noise at all. After some thought, he decided it had been in his head, and he went back to lying on the couch and reading his yank mags. He was getting into a new photo set when the knocking came again, louder this time. He dropped the magazine and jumped off the couch, running for the door.

He pulled the door open with authority and found still nobody. He shut the door, and resolved that the next morning he'd go to the mainland and find a gun for protection. To get through the night with peace of mind, he stuck a chair under the doorknob and went to sleep.

After acquiring his gun, he returned to the island and waited for more knocking. It waited a few days, but there was another booming knock on the door. He wrenched it open, and finding still no one, he set out to hunt for his tormentor.

On this walk, he saw people, and for every person he saw he fired at them. But every time he rushed up to

where he had seen them fall, there was nothing there. All he ever found was leaves and tree branches, and no footprints or signs of people.

He began to hear voices whispering through the windows at all hours of the day and night. His journeys outside were less and less, he was becoming a shut-in hermit. After a few weeks of not going outside, he started to notice things inside were moved. His magazines were in a different order and there was less popcorn for him to eat.

He determined that he would set a trap to catch his personal ghost. He went back to the mainland and ‘shopped’ for some rat poison. That night he put the poison in his popcorn, and then went to bed, leaving the bowl on the table.

The next morning there were no sounds coming from the cabin. No one had been close enough to hear the groans that had littered the night air. There was no one to come and find the bloated body with foam drooling down its chin. Jim lay in the kitchen with poisoned popcorn in his belly and rotted away to nothing and then there were no men left on Earth.

This story won second place in the “Last Man on Earth” contest!





Last Man on Earth

Cristina Jones

3rd place winner of “Last Man on Earth” contest.

The last man on Earth sat in a room, there was a knock at the door. He drew his head up slowly and stared at the door wide-eyed. A chill ran down his neck from the top of his head, trickling down his back and ending at his feet. He opened the door, and much to his surprise, an exotic looking woman with bright blue eyes and dark complected skin stared at him with a smile.

“Hello?” he asked, unsure if the woman spoke English.

“Aloha. How are you...still here?” she asked him.

Hawaiian. How did I survive? How did she swim the ocean and survive?

He smiled. “Didn’t take much.” His eyes couldn’t help but stare her up and down. He started at her shoes, tore up and stained black, then at her muscular legs in shorts. She was thin with an extremely fit torso and small arms in a cut-off shirt, large perky breasts and long jet black hair hanging to her shoulders.

The woman took a step closer to the man, coming closer to press her breasts into his chest, and lined her lips up with his. The man kissed her furiously on the lips, her cheeks, and her neck before scooping her body up with brute force; pressing her against the wall. Her legs wrapped around his chiseled waist line and while he was too hot and bothered to notice, her legs began to grow. Her shoes fell off and hit the ground, and tentacles were extending from her feet. They swirled around behind the man’s back when his penis entered her. Together, they let out a moan.

He felt a hot, stinging gash along side of his penis when he ejaculated into the woman. Slowly pulling himself out of the woman, he looked down to his penis slick with dark red blood dripping onto the ground. He flung himself backward and fell onto the ground.

“What the fuck did you do to me!?” cried the man. Hyperventilating in shock his mouth dropped open as he watched the hawaiian woman’s limbs expand so large they ripped the clothes right off her body. Her breasts flattened over a muscular chest as she rose toward the ceiling. Her arms and legs totaled 8 tentacles, swirling the length of the room and down around the man’s face. He blinked his sweating eye lids hard and quick three times. She was still there; hissing, spitting and drooling at him. Frozen on the ground, a pool of blood flowed around his penis as he gripped his shaft with salty hands.

The mid section of the creature quickly inflated into a perfectly round ball. A loud “Ssss” sound came from her vagina, and out fell a slimy sack of tooth, bone and muscle. The man scrambled to his feet and backed himself into a corner of the room, guarding his penis while his body trembled. Beads of sweat rolled off the thin skin sack as it expanded and contracted in short breaths. To his amazement, the fingers of an infant’s hand pierced through the fleshy membrane.

Standing over the baby, the woman the man made love to just minutes ago was smiling at him again. She ripped the baby from the gooey casing and cradled him in her arms. The baby gazed into its mother’s eyes.

“Mama?” it asked.

With glowing eyes it turned its head to the man still shaking in the corner of the room, dripping in sweat.

“Daddy?”



EXQUISITE CORPSES

An introduction to Gothic –and Industrial Music

By L. V. Kramhoeft

I was a home-grown goth

The world is a miserable place and life is full of suffering. This has been the profound insight that many great minds have arrived at – from Buddha, who upon meditating for 49 days straight received enlightenment and realized that the essence of human life is suffering, to Douglas P, lead singer of the seminal Goth band Death In June who sang: “Nothing changes, only gets worse.” Some people run from suffering and try to dull the pain of the burning void with constant acquisitions, love affairs or drugs. Others realize that, like the song by Nine Inch Nails, “The way out is through.”

Art and music has always drawn upon the darker aspects of life for inspiration, but no musical culture has so openly embraced pain, heartache and longing as Goth. To those emotional cowards who try all their life to ignore or avoid the problematic, but inevitable emotions that come with a life lived fully, this worship of the darkness seems incomprehensible, scary – even abominable. But there is light at the end of the tunnel. Just like the Christian cross can be at the same time a tool for torture, it can also symbolize enlightenment and love. And no human being can be said to be fully whole until both heaven and hell has been integrated into the personae.

I was 15 when I discovered Goth culture – a shy, imaginative kid with some major personal issues, hopelessly lost in the gap between the safe embrace of child-

hood, and what seemed like no future I could imagine myself in. I was sort of hoping that adulthood would just go away and leave me alone if I ignored it vehemently enough, but of course it wouldn’t. At that time, becoming aware of Goth culture felt like a drowning man being handled a rope. There were other freaks like me out there. Some of them were even cool!

Now, my first exposure to Goth culture did not come, like so many others of my generation, from Marilyn Manson, but rather from the character Merton J. Dingle in the TV show “Big Wolf on Campus”, and that was quite emblematic really, as it wasn’t a search for spiritual truth beyond the veil of Maya, a desire to belong to a group of cool kids (I didn’t know any other Goths anyway), or even the hope of getting a girlfriend that drew me into Goth, but rather the fact that it seemed to promise an escape from the intimidating world of “adulthood”.

Of course, in the end, I was forced to grow up anyway, and lucky for that, but at the time I was hooked on finding out more about Gothic culture and, most importantly, how to properly be one. Even if everyone else just thought I was weird.

“We can’t play but let’s make a band anyway!”

Like so many other innovative movements in modern pop culture Goth has its roots in the musical big bang that was punk in 1976. Though the term “gothic” had

been used as far back as 1967 to describe the music of The Doors, it wasn't until 1979 when Tony Wilson, the manager of Joy Division, used the word to describe this new post-punk band that the phrase really began to make sense in terms of a musical movement.

Joy Division (originally Warsaw), was formed in Manchester by Bernard Sumner, Peter Hook and Terry Mason after being inspired by a Sex Pistols gig, and they were soon joined by a manic depressive young man with the word "Hate" written across the back of his leather jacket. Though at the time happily married, when Ian Curtis took the stage he turned into a complete madman that danced as if possessed and sang as if his life depended on it – and maybe it did. The story of Ian Curtis is a sad one of many ups and downs, a life of struggling with epilepsy and eventually his suicide, but his short career is a startling example of the art that can spring from suffering – to this day it is hard to find a band that matches the intensity of the doomsday music of Joy Division and its frontman tearing his black heart out on stage.

With their debut album "Unknown Pleasures" (1979) Joy Division presented the world with a darkly melodic soundscape haunted by hollow, resounding vocals, hard drums, cool, distanced guitars and a lyrical universe that was more introvert than the pissed-off, in your face political machine gun barking of punk. As they say in "Joy Division – The Documentary", the music evolved from punk's "Fuck off" to more of a "I'm fucked" feeling!

"Eyes dark

Grey lenses frightened of the sun
we would have a fine time living in the night"

Joy Division: Transmission (Closer, 1980)

Thus the seed had been sown, but there was still no Goth scene as such. Things were stirring in the wake of Joy Division however, particularly two bands, Bauhaus and Siouxsie & the Banshees were getting ready to define the sound and the look for the descendants of punk, but more about them later.



Throbbing Gristle - early industrial pioneers

Industrial Music for Industrial People

In October 1979 Joy Division got their first gig outside the UK, in a former sugar refinery in Brussels that had been turned into a performance space by the Avant-garde theatre group Plan K. It was here Ian Curtis met one of his literary heroes, William Burroughs (this particularly awkward meeting is recounted in the before mentioned documentary on Joy Division), who had a strong influence on another new musical genre that was starting to take shape, namely industrial. Cabaret Voltaire and Throbbing Gristle were two pioneers of electronic and industrial music who also performed in Plan K's sugar refinery, and they were inspired by Burroughs' method of cutting up texts and arranging the words in new ways, a technique known simply as cut-up. In a similar fashion, industrial musicians would cut up pieces of music, use samples of machine sounds, tape recordings and pure noise to deconstruct even the slender framework of music that punk had left behind. Inspired by what its pioneers saw as the obvious decadence of western industrial civilization, industrial music became a vicious, electronic fuck-you to society.

Described by Throbbing Gristle front man Genesis P. Orridge, the aim of industrial was to break down all boundaries – of gender, sexuality, society, noise and music. "Everybody is capable of making music – and anything that makes noise can be a musical instrument,"

was the mantra behind Throbbing Gristle, a band that to this day can be hard to stomach.

German industrial pioneers Einstürzende Neubaten (meaning “Falling new buildings”) formed in West-Berlin in 1980 by Beate Bartel, Gudrun Gut, N.U. Unruh and Blixa Bargeld from Nick Cave’s proto-goth band The Birthday Party, certainly lived up to Genesis P. Orridge’s mission statement : The group would utilize scrap metal and building tools in their music and their concerts to produce a unique wall of noise and music, and had concerts cancelled for putting the audience in danger!

The Rise of Goth

While industrial was deconstructing music and society in the underground, others were building new houses in the world above, expanding and developing the direction that Joy Division had pointed to.

Siouxsie & The Banshees, originally christened Flowers of Romance by Johnny Rotten, started out as a group of punks who followed the Sex Pistols and hung out in Bromley in Kent. They didn’t know how to play any instruments, but when they learned that one of the bands



How can you not fall in love with Siouxsie Sioux of Siouxsie & The Banshees?

scheduled to play at Malcolm McLaren’s “100 Club Punk Festival” had cancelled, they jumped at the chance and formed a band. The original line-up consisted of the flamboyant Siouxsie Sioux, Steven Severin, Marco Pirroni and John Steven Richie, who would later go on to become the infamous Sid Vicious of Sex Pistols. Realizing their musical limitations at the 11th hour, the band quickly decided to just use their time in the spotlight to “make as much noise as possible”, and so Siouxsie ended up taping three microphones together and barking out “Smoke on The water” through a wall of noise. It might not have sounded much like the band’s later performances, but the energy was there and the seeds had been sown to one of the greatest Goth bands of all time. Between their debut album, “The Scream” in 1978 and up to their break-up in 1999, Siouxsie & The Banshees recorded 11 almost consistently brilliant studio albums with 1981’s “Juju” as perhaps their masterpiece.

Listening to Siouxsie & The Banshees is much like being on psychedelic drugs – it’s hard to put into words but one gets the feeling it sifts into your brain and opens up the doors of the subconscious – to haunting childhood memories, strange snap-shots of bitter-sweet dreams and repressed feelings of lust and guilt.

*“High above
The sickle moon
All senseless thought
Slips and drowns
A place, a time
Gone out of mind
Reaction swims
The opal tide
Ferry me down, leave well alone
Ferry me down, turn to stone”*

-Siouxsie & Banshees: Turn To Stone (Peepshow, 1988)

Bauhaus’ first single, “Bela Lugosi’s Dead” (which featured an image from the German expressionist horror movie “The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari” as sleeve art) from 1979 is generally considered to be the first pure Goth record. Though the band did arrive in the wake of Joy Division, the contemporary critique of them being knock-offs is highly unjustified. Where one can almost imagine Joy Division being the sound of Goth as the depressed, chain-smoking loner wandering the streets at night, Bauhaus would be that same guy all dressed up and ready to go out dancing at the Bat Cave.



Pretty boys: Bauhaus

*"Features so fine
Rouge and eyeliner
Things I fancy
Just like Nancy"*

-Bauhaus: Boys (1979)

Bauhaus was a bunch of good looking guys from Northampton who wore make-up and flirted with an androgynous David Bowie-inspired look that anticipated the 80s Goth scene and whose music was weird, wild and filled with references to art, literature and horror movies. Their sound was dark but also playful, experimental and gaudy, and it is no wonder that they and other early Goth bands received the nick-name "positive punk" for a while. As NME put it, "Bauhaus are to Goth what Radiohead are to Prog".

Dancing on Holy Books

Ian Curtis was long since dead and buried when the Batcave in London opened its doors in 1982, and most of the kids felt that Joy Division was too bleak anyway. They wanted dark music they could dance to – without falling in with the New Romantics who went straight for the hit lists with polished-off pop songs.

The Batcave originally specialized in glam and new wave, but soon became the rallying point for the emerging Goths who would eventually make the place theirs, with bands such as Bauhaus, Siouxsie & The Banshees, Foetus and The Birthday Party among their regulars. By then, the Goth scene consisted of what Daniel Ash of Bauhaus called "androgynous space demons" – kids who dressed up in a similar fashion as the band themselves, sporting black clothes, lace, jewelry and fetish wear.

Siouxsie & The Banshees and The Cure also had a huge influence on the look of Goth, as Siouxsie describes it in an interview in the book "The Gloom Generation": "Put it down to Robert and Severin together. It's all their fault. Both of them would take my clothes and my jewelry. There were some strange nights going on there, lots of cross-dressing and clothes swapping. Except they never had anything I wanted to wear."

The Robert that Siouxsie mentions is of course Goth icon Robert Smith who had a short stint as a guitarist in the Banshees but is much more famous as lead singer of his own band The Cure. After a couple of fairly raw post-punk albums The Cure had gone in a bleak, existential direction with albums such as "Faith" in 1981 and "Pornography" in 1982, and though they never considered themselves a part of the Goth scene, Smith's look definitely influenced (and continues to do so) many young Goths.

*"Catch me if I fall
I'm losing hold
I can't just carry on this way
And every time
I turn away
Lose another blind game
The idea of perfection holds me
Suddenly I see you change
Everything at once
The same
But the mountain never moves"*

-The Cure: Faith (Faith, 1981)



Gloomy Goth icon Robert Smith of The Cure

Boots Stamping

While Goth went out to seize the night, industrial was thriving and mutating into Electro-industrial, EBM, Industrial rock and other subgenres, like a virus inside the matrix. It wouldn't be until a particularly talented and angry young man from Ohio stepped onto the stage of Woodstock in 1994 branding the word industrial rock into the worlds collective music map that the genre really entered the mainstream, but while Trent Reznor was still playing synth-pop in The Exotic Birds, bands like Leather Nun from Sweden, SPK from Australia, and Skinny Puppy from Canada were exploring and expanding the borderlands of noise and music.

Though the genre to some degree shared Goth's fascination with the night, the occult and other traditional Kabbalistic feminine aspects of the divine, Industrial and its fans developed in a more masculine direction and began to flirt with militaristic and totalitarian themes and imagery. The fashion that went along with the music reflected this and appeared as a rough-around-the-edges, stripped-down macho ver-

sion of Goth with a touch of punk aesthetics.

This is not to say that industrial music or their far (dubbed Rivetheads by the late eighties) were or ai fascists, rather it was a desire to provoke and caus controversy, like when Laibach from Slovenia state they were "as much fascists as Hitler was a painter!", c as a satire and a commentary to society, almost like musical parallel to George Orwell's "1984".

Some Rivetheads, often intelligent and creative individuals, also felt empowered by embracing the extremely masculine and militaristic style of clothing an music.

Vancouver-based Skinny Puppy, consisting of cEvi Key and Nivek Ogre and a shifting roster of additional members, to a great deal anticipated the sound of the 90s Industrial metal and extreme metal acts with John Carpenter-like synthesizer themes, dystopia lyrics and samples of horror movies, and the visual imagery of later shock-rockers like Marilyn Manson. Though lead singer Nivek Ogre rarely got through concert without being soaked in (fake) blood, the band occasionally produced musical pieces that resembled conventional songs, and albums like the brilliant "To



Dark Park" from 1990 feels frisky and melodic enough in its mixture of electronica, EBM and techno to make a reasonably easy industrial album to start out with for the curious.

"An extreme solution no fossil fuel mimicking exhaust rattles troublesome a madmans vast direct iron grooved world primary state average distance closer to the sun draws a comet nearer to a complex destruction a spectre so violent"

Skinny Puppy: Morpheus Laughing
(Skinny Puppy: Too Dark Park, 1990)

Another important Industrial band is Ministry who started out in 1981 as a synth-pop band but switched to a mixture of heavy metal and industrial that would become particularly commercially viable in the 90s with bands such as Nine Inch Nails and KMFDM, and produced the classic goth/industrial anthem "Every Day Is Halloween" that captures the essence of the Gothic outsider with a certain tongue-in-cheek self-irony:

*"Well any time, any place, anywhere that I go
all the people seem to stop and stare
they say 'Why are you dressed like it's Halloween?
you look so absurd, you look so obscene
Oh, why can't I live a life for me?
why should I take the abuse that's served?
why can't they see they're just like me
it's the same, it's the same in the whole wide world
well I let their teeny minds think
that they're dealing with someone
who is over the brink
and I dress this way just to keep them at bay"*

Ministry: Every Day Is Halloween (Ministry, 1984)

Carpe Noctem!

Now as an adult I'm sometimes asked about the reason for this fascination with death and darkness – I don't consider myself a Goth anymore, though I still dress much as one, enjoy the same music and deal with the same subjects in my own art and writing. Stephen King was once asked by a journalist why he wrote such horrible stories to which he replied "Why do you as-

sume I have a choice?", which I think to a certain degree says it all – I don't feel like I have to justify or defend anything, but I will in closing add a few remarks on the subject however.

Of course on the surface we enjoy the thrills and the chills – a lot of it is about looking good in black and scaring little kids for fun and profit. Of course it is. But there is a deeper dimension to the resonance of dark music and culture.

As stated in the introduction life is full of pain, suffering and absurdity. This is a fact one can't escape. I for my part think dealing with all these problematic feelings (through art, music, writing etc.) is both healthy and necessary. As a teenager who's just discovering that life is complicated, unfair and often painful, it can seem like the only release to wear the pain like a crown and scream to the world about how damn much it all sucks, but that passes – hopefully.

I'm not advocating a wallowing in sadness or self-pity – nor denial and fake smiles - but rather a therapeutic approach. One of acceptance and embrace. Horrible things happen. Maybe in processing them and making art out of them we can hope to be like the oysters that turn a bothersome grain of sand into a pearl. Or, like Henry Miller put it: "If you want to get over a woman, turn her into a work of art."

And black is not just darkness and depression. It's also mystery and spirituality. Our culture has been taught to fear the darkness, the feminine and the spiritual through years of Christian indoctrination so it's only natural we are going to act out a little in casting off this yoke.

Like the full moon in tarot that beckons to the soul to awaken and explore the realms beyond the logical and material, the world of the night can be creative, inspiring and sensual. It can inspire divine lunacy and enrich our lives.

Of course, few go as deep as this. It's not the aim of this article either. But at its best, haven't we all felt at some point that the truth about life, pain, blood, sweat and tears could be found in a rock and roll song?

And black just looks damn sexy.





A MOTHER'S LOVE

O. D. HEGRE

Mommy, mommy, hold me close.

Am I not the one you love the most?

Hush now child. Find someplace to play.

Baby is crying. You cannot stay.

But where will I be if not with you?

Denied your love, what might I do?

The room glowed in shades of green - a bit eerie, even for him. The manufacturer claimed a phosphor screen of that color optimized the human eye's visual acuity. He held out his hand. The resolution was quite extraordinary.

The idea came to him after watching the 1991 Oscar winning thriller, Silence of the Lambs. Good old Buffalo Bill, the night-vision goggles made things so much easier. With that innovation, Herbert Marston had helped so many more.

He looked down on the sleeping boy. Tonight, another lucky lad would find freedom from his burden. In her sorrow and in her relief, another mother would find the way back to the true source of her joy. A mother's love renewed ... undiluted ... unwasted.

He made his way down the hall.

Earlier that day, Herbert had left the boardroom and the responsibilities of his real estate empire behind. He took particular pleasure in visiting the malls that his conglomerate owned ... Mother would have loved these places. The food court at the Mid-Valley Spectrum boasted one of those mini-donut shops ... like the ones from his youth ... like the ones at the State Fair ... where, once a year, Mother looked forward to popping those little buttery balls of fried dough. Even now, despite thirty pounds of excess baggage, he could not pass up one of those shops. Besides, children always frequented the food courts. Little families – most in good shape, but occasionally he would find one he could help.

Today the property looked encouragingly busy. At the open-air booth, enjoying his thousand-calorie lunch, the scene unfolded before him. The boy (maybe around thirteen) bore up courageously while the little brat appeared to make her demands (Herbert had a particular dislike for females around six years of age). The exact nature of the fuss eluded him but when the mother came to the little girl's aid, Herbert felt everything stirring again inside.

Their Lexus led him to this nice little suburban neighborhood on the West side (he'd gone back to the office, worked late while considering the matter). The walkout basement entrance offered little resistance.

He had reached the end of the hall; the door decorations left no doubt to who slept inside.

Jame Gumb sewed things ... a renovator, so to speak ... putting things back together. Herbert found no use for thread but he did seek companionship in a pair of scissors ... her scissors and his interest only centered on cutting things apart. It seemed so appropriate: she cut him off from her attention, her love; now he severed relationships, relieving others of the misery he had suffered.

His first *experience* had been personal - but not 'up close and personal'. As he progressed, the need to take a more active role materialized. 'Accidents' always proved useful but they took planning. Over the years, other emotions joined the mix of his original anger and jealousy. Now he welcomed spontaneity as his muse.

Herbert withdrew the 12-inch shears from his jacket pocket. His other hand held the pillow - messy came to mind. In the verdant gleaming, cartoon characters decorating the walls stood frozen in their antics - watching as he leaned over the bed. For a moment he looked into open eyes. Glowing white pupils stared back at him. Just a peep ... before the scissors found their mark. Then ... hold ... hold. He held till the commotion stopped.

No glare from the overhead light. Had others before him complained, he wondered? A cotton sheet, tacked to the ceiling on either side of the broken fixture, diffused the light into a shimmering. Times were tough – a recession the paper said. No sense the State wasting money, renovating a room like this. Especially now that it saw such infrequent use. A nice gesture, however, on the guards' part, he thought. If he could just get loose of these straps, perhaps he could reach up, grab the sheet of cloth and garrote at least one of the bastards before someone put a bullet in his brain. Herbert looked out, beyond the wall of reinforced plastic separating him from the rest of the world, into the eyes staring back at him. Wouldn't that be a nice show, he thought and managed a little nod to go with his broad grin.

Then he settled back down. He looked up again at the overhead light. He had his doubts about the other one ... the one at the end of the tunnel. No ... this would be the last light he would ever see. The reflection of the clock off the Plexiglas read 10:56 p.m. - still time for a little reminiscing.

What a journey - a lifetime with only one regret. She just never gave him what he needed; there was always someone else. He did his best to earn it but without her attention he simply broke and followed an inevitable path. At least that's the way he saw it.

"Herbert Marston, the State of Indiana has found you..."

He never fit into the social order and it only saw him as disorder. At first they labeled him a sociopath. From his standpoint, the lack of a conscience posed no disadvantage when it came to the business world. Later, when they found out how he dealt with his anger, they labeled him a psychopath. Just a matter of degree in his opinion but even the best lawyers in the country couldn't get him off with a plea of insanity. Not after what he had done and definitely not in Indiana. And now on this night, the rest of them would take their revenge. In a matter of minutes, it would all end; he could rest. No tunnel. No light.

Herbert raised his head as much as the restraints would allow, turned and again looked out beyond the transparent barrier. They stared back: the parents, the grandparents. A few of the women diverted their eyes. Even the most 'Christian' of them couldn't forgive him; he had no doubt of that. They all despised him and he didn't give a rat's ass.

The words of the Warden again caught his attention.

"...and have mercy on your soul."

He couldn't help but smile as he turned his cheek to the cool smooth fabric of the gurney. Bullshit even at the end. How fitting. Mercy wasn't in his vocabulary. Most had begged for it, one little shit in particular. The scissors 'fixed' that crybaby before ... and Herbert's mind lost itself in the past. He used the scissors a lot, he realized. It was his favorite.

A sound.

He understood: the first push. A chill passed over him; the chemical now flowed throughout his body - to quiet him, make him docile, not resist the leather straps that held his wrists and his ankles. No need. He felt calm. He welcomed where a few more ticks of the clock would take him – nowhere ... into nothingness. The fantasy that he would see her again dissipated long ago. But those first seven years - when he had her all to himself – still graced his memory. He did the chores where he could (a handy man did the major tasks after his father left them). Always at her side; he helped with her sewing: pickups and deliveries, fetching things for her ... *Don't run with those scissors, Herbert Marston!* ... A dutiful little soldier, through Mother he learned the meaning of love. He also sat beside her every Sunday in Church. He listened to the words of the sermons intently and on some Sundays ... he almost pissed his pants. There he learned the meaning of fear.

Then his mother remarried and the other one came along. Everything changed; his anger began to build.

It was a Wednesday. He remembered because it took him two days to get ready. At thirteen, the resentment he felt for his abandonment raged within him. He put down his bible. He picked up a hand mirror off her dresser and looked into the teal gray eyes staring back at him. He had beautiful eyes; Mother always said that. Then he looked deeper ... inward. What he saw convinced him that it was all bullshit; he had nothing to fear. Absolutely nothing.

Something caught his eye. Again Herbert raised his head and looked down at the end of the gurney. For just a moment he felt the sphincter of his bladder spasm slightly. Maybe the sedative was a good thing; no one had said anything about hallucinations.

She sat there on the side of his bed, smiling. Gone twenty years and she still looked as young as the day she died. She just smiled, her head held at an odd angle. He couldn't kill them all. His mother was a fucking baby factory. One gone and the woman just produced another and then another. Each new one took more and more from him. He had done his best with the first, the one now sitting at the end of his gurney. But the others? He had tried yet failed.

"You and I have some business to settle, Herbert."

He heard the voice of a six-year-old speaking words way beyond her years.

"I've waited a long time."

The voice sounded as cold as the fluid racing through his veins. "You can't do anything to me." Herbert pushed himself to remain conscious. "I'll be dead in two minutes, you little bitch." He tried to catch his breath. A sheet covered him. No one could see he had soiled his pants.

"Two minutes ... maybe a few more," she giggled.

Her fingers drummed on his lower leg. He wondered for a moment why he could *feel* a figment of his imagination touching him.

"Don't I know it!" She slapped her little knee. "Then you'll be mine!"

He watched her eyes light up as if someone had blown on hot coals.

"Ever consider why you couldn't work your little magic on the others?"

His thinking faltered for a moment. He fought back against the drug; he wanted to understand what she meant. His mind reached back ... back ...

Autumn and the apples were falling from the trees. Their time to play grew shorter every day. After school, they usually took the long way home, down by the river ... along the bank, past the processing plant. Somewhere they would have to cross. Many choices existed. On that Friday, Herbert knew exactly where.

She kept up, he saw to that. A couple of thirteen-year olds can move pretty fast over any terrain. A six-year old needs more time. They'd move and rest till she caught up (Herbert wanted a witness). They always had her in view. Never once did they lose sight of her ... never once. They saw her all the way down. They saw her fall all the way down to the rocks below.

He had chosen to cross at Ell's point - high above the river but safe ... usually. Half way across the suspension bridge, the boys turned back to check on Sadie. Herbert watched as she made her way to the bridge platform and took the last step up to the wooden deck; her foot slipped as a large rock dislodged from its earthen bed; her hand reached out for the rope railing. Too far? No. Her small fingers encircled the thick strand as her weight transferred to the braid of hemp.

"Hemp rope should last a good twenty years", the Sheriff told his mom. "County checked that there bridge three years ago. Everthin was just fine. But these last two summers ... been God-awful hot and with all that rain ... weather affects things, ya know," he said ... then sipped his tea. "A course, could a been a manufacturer's defect. We got the rope, if you wanna litigate. The ends are frayed where it gave way. Maybe a raccoon or beaver got to it. Hard to say, Mrs. Marston. Just hard to say."

Herbert remembered his difficulty in suppressing a smile. He'd seen his mother use her scissors in a number of ways on cloth and yarn ... and rope. He used her whetstone to sharpen the edges. Repositioning a rock that size offered no challenge at all. Probably the first tumble broke her scrawny little neck. He hoped it wasn't so because the next few seconds passed without mercy. In the end, the little body lay folded upon itself on the rocks below. Stones and pebbles continued bouncing down the cliff – some of them reaching the water, some of them falling on her ... gently prodding her to get up. She didn't. Well, not then anyway.

"For me ... yeah. You managed." She stared at him, her head kind of leaning on her right shoulder ... wobbling just a bit. "But think about it, Herbert. For all the other attempts you made something got in the way. Oh you did your shit on strangers. But not on my family. Ever think why? No, you never had that much in you. Something got in your way."

He watched as she tapped her chest with something shiny.

"Me."

He looked back up into her eyes. They were empty now but somehow he could see beyond them ... something ... "Noffing allwas gothes onth's ww..way." His tongue felt like it filled his entire mouth. "Bu fr you, yu lill bith, it wen ju..just fyne."

"Push two."

The warden's voice seemed miles away; an echo in some valley on a distant moon. Herbert could only manage to squint now. But in the empty eyes of his little sister he could see movement - a crowd gathering ... little children moving forward, each carrying something shiny, something metal - opening and closing. As the image of his sister slowly began to dissipate, he realized her hands held something, as well ... some thing she opened ... then closed ... opened ... then-

He tried to scream but the drugs now had him fully in their grasp. As his conscious mind drifted away he could hear the snapping sound of his mother's scissors and Herbert Marston realized he would have plenty of time for screaming – *in two minutes ... maybe a few more. Don't I know it! Then you'll be mine.*



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The Art of the Domestic Grotesque: An Interview with Caleb J. Ross



Surreal Grotesque: All your novels from “Stranger Will” to “I didn’t mean to be kevin” and “as a machine and parts”, all feature characters who in some way exist on the fringe of society and do not belong. Does this reflect your own personality or feelings at all or do you just find that type of character more interesting to write?

Caleb J. Ross: These people are way more interesting to write than the converse: unafflicted, boring people. Conflict equals story. When dealing with the dregs, the conflict is inherent. In a way, I’m just being lazy. It’s romantic to feel part of the fringe, to be or have something unique that the rest of society feels compelled to pity, but not to shatter any illusions, I’m not one of the fringe-dwellers. There are times when I wish I could truly embody that romance, but at the end of the day, I’m just another capital N Normal person with voyeuristic tendencies, like all of us, an actor rather than a passive citizen.

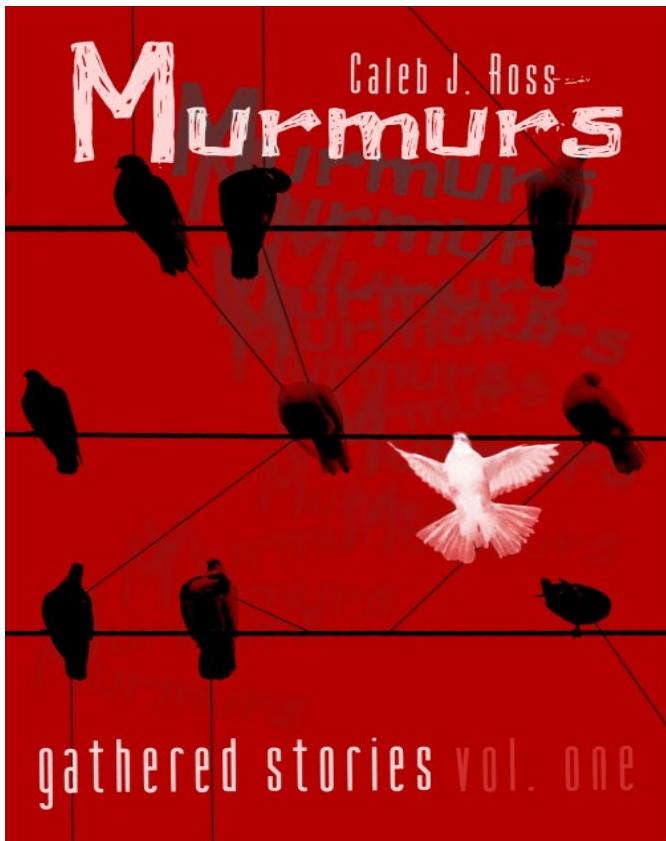
SG: Your work doesn’t really resemble a genre in any way, which is nice, although people try to pigeonhole certain writers as being Chuck Palahniuk-esque or in the vein of “urban noir”. If you had to describe your writing style

of work to someone who has never read you before, how would you describe your writing?

CJR: I use the term Domestic Grotesque a lot, which basically means family dynamic meets visceral irrationality. The best example I can think of—though this book came out after I coined the term Domestic Grotesque—is Matt Bell’s Cataclysm Baby. A lot of Brian Evenson’s work would also fit. I love the imagery I can get away with when I write the grotesque, and I love the inherent tension when dealing with a family and their inborn troubles. I’m not against being compared or pigeonholed. In a way, it’s validating to know that I, as an author, belong to something greater than myself. Wow, that sentence makes me seem like my own anti-hero.

SG: So in your book of shorter stories, “Murmurs”, there is a story called “Car Dodging” about young boys running in front of cars at night that you say is rooted in your childhood. What was your childhood like? Do you have anymore unusual stories like this?

CJR: We were a strange group. We generally spent most of our time improvising ninja weapons, testing said weapons, and then cleaning up the aftermath before parents showed up. We accidentally set off a homemade smoke bomb in a friend’s Main Street apartment, which sent smoke billowing out into the primary street in the small town of 4,000 people. Needless to say, the citizens weren’t happy. Homemade napalm, tennis ball gre-



nades, exploding arrows, we diddled with it all. The Jolly Roger's Anarchist Cookbook was our Bible. I think car dodging was a way for us to challenge one another's ninja quickness. Luckily, we passed with leaping colors.

SG: From reading your work, I've found it reminds me of certain aspects of my own writing in that I like to explore the feelings that people have that they don't want to admit, that are too ugly to consciously accept but that dwell beneath the surface. Your characters have strange careers like human remains removal specialist, do you think there is an aspect to most people that takes a perverse joy in the more grotesque aspects of life?

CJR: Yes, I think so. I truly believe that, barring mental illness, nobody is cruel for the sake of being cruel. Or, said a cheesier way, we're all good-to-neutral at heart. Therefore, when I hear about someone involved with something odd (a strange job, a perversion, etc.) I want to know more about the mind behind that place in life.

I don't know that people take a perverse joy in the grotesque, as that implies the joy is mentally unfounded.

Rather, I think we take joy in understanding. There's something about learning about lifestyles so extremely different than our own that interests us. After all, no matter how different we are, we are all still human (damn, back with the cheese). Thus the popularity of shows like Taboo, Oddities, and the entire NatGeo channel.

SG: You already have two fairly successful novels, a novella and two short story collections, what are you working on now and where would you like to see your writing career going in the next decade?

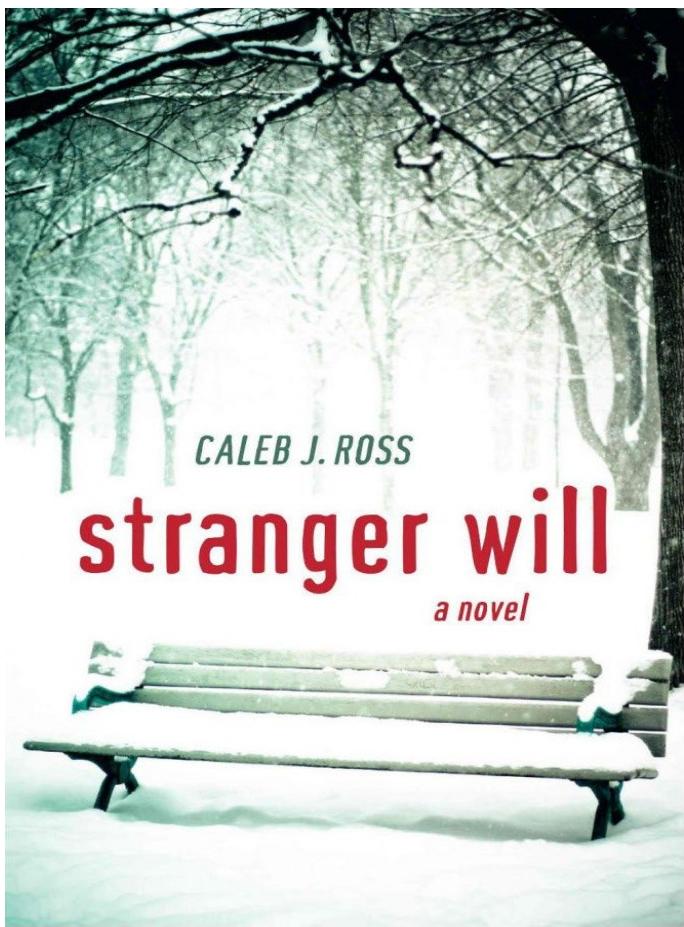
CJR: I have a couple more novels in the hopper, one, tentatively titled The Synapse, is about a boy born in a retirement/religious commune who unwillingly becomes a lightning rod for the entire community. He grows up to create a pill that essentially renders religion obsolete. It's a much "grander" book than I've ever written before, but I'm enjoying it. The second, no tentative title yet, is one that came about after a conversation with Phil Jourdan at a local Kansas City bar. What would happen if two friends made a bet to see who could first convince a stranger to commit suicide? That premise makes the book sound depressing, but I don't think it will be.

In ten years, I'd love to have a few more books out there. Also, I've been getting into this YouTube channel thing quite a bit lately. I upload about two videos per week at a channel called The Book Burning Channel. The videos take a humorous stab at books, with funny book reviews, bits, rants, and writing advice. One day, I'd love to make that a second full-time job, but that's many, many years away.

SG: Now for some of the fun questions. Arrange these careers in order of what you would most likely be doing if you weren't a writer. Mortician, game show host, porn star, serial killer, veterinarian, telemarketer, gynecologist.

CJR: Easy. A veterinarian to meet women for my moonlighting gynecologist gig where I'd dupe clients into snuff films (porn star) which naturally folds into being a serial killer. To keep the money in my own hands, I'd prep all bodies myself (mortician). After spending a few years under the radar as a telemarketer, I'd strike gold with my game show based on unsolved murders.

SG: Assign a color to an emotion. Despair. Madness, orgasmic, joy, psychosis, rage.



CJR: Strange that you ask. I've been trying to train myself over the past few months to become a sort of synesthete, those people who literally smell colors and associate visual elements to text like person and city names. I recently read *Moonwalking with Einstein* by Joshua Foer, a book about the very idea of memory (and association) training. With all that being said:

Madness = Purple (probably because of that Muse video)

Despair = Brown (I imagine sand, for some reason)

Orgasmic = Red (blood, heat, life)

Joy = Red (see orgasmic)

Psychosis = White (padded rooms, bright lights. TV has trained me to see psychosis this way)

Rage = Damn. Maybe Red again. That Chevelle song, "The Red," is likely the culprit. I'm going to have to choose where to eventually place red, otherwise I might get my orgasms and rage mixed, sending me to a purple well of brown where I'll spend the rest of my life seeing white.

SG: Pick a random series of lottery numbers for our readers.

CJR: I don't know how many numbers are necessary for a lottery (I've never played, that I can remember) so let's go with 34297647582. Or, if considering Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery," just the number 1 is enough; 1 giant rock.

SG: Create an erotic fortune cookie message.

CJR: You will be penetrated (in bed)

SG: If the devil is 72, God is 24 and Purgatory is 101. What is Buddha?

CJR: 3.14. Get it!? Pi(e). Cause he's fat!

SG: Rewrite one of the ten commandments for a modern world.

CJR: Commandment #1: Thou shalt not believe in me

SG: Give us your biography from a third person perspective as written by someone who cannot write English very well (ex: an ESL student with mild brain damage).

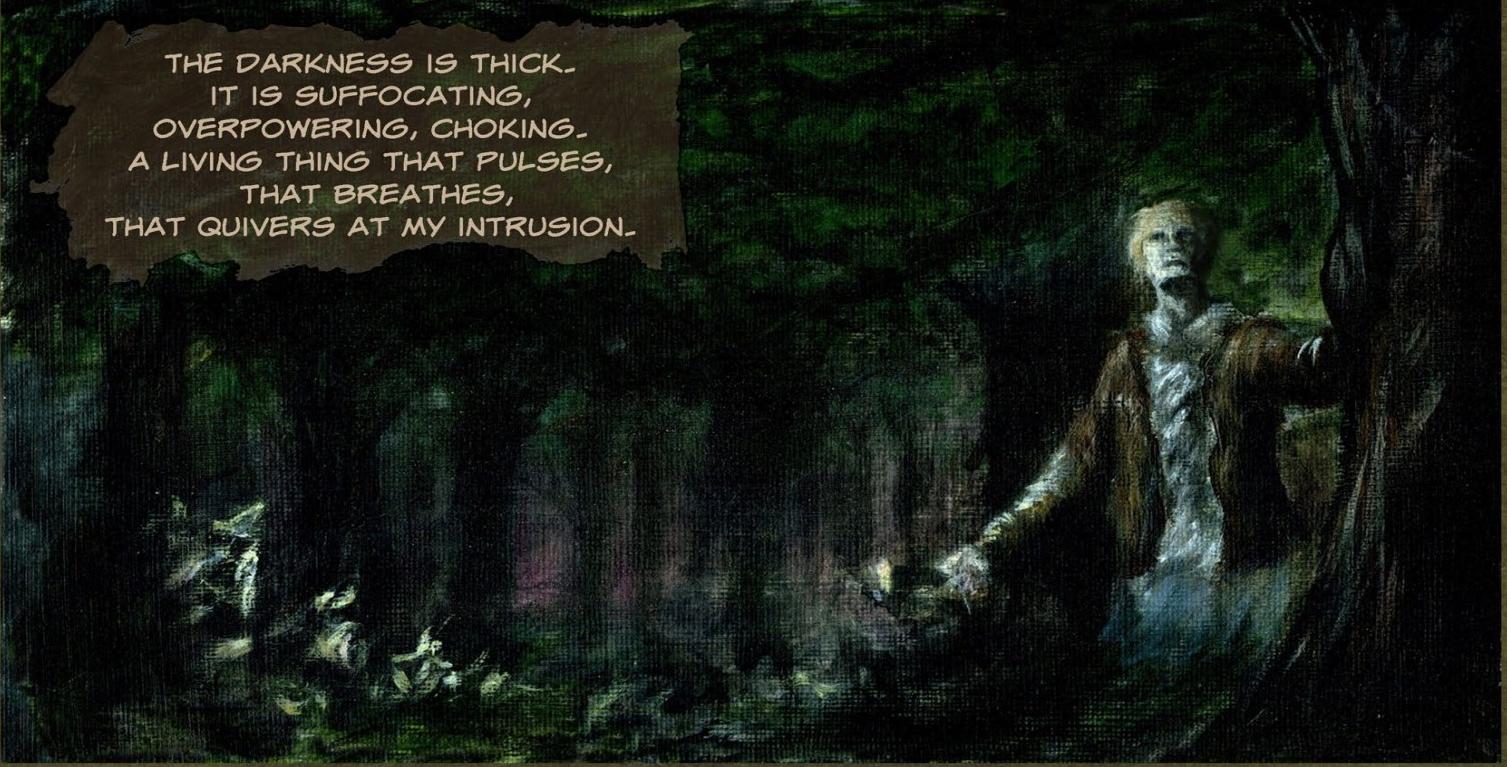
CJR: Mr. Caleb of Ross maintains a Certificate of Uni Achievement of writing of Emporia State University. Papers of his appear lots in books and lots in not books. Scribes of five bindings of fictional and historical. He posts at The Manarchy Magazine. He has images on youtube where he burns books. He has relations with twitters, and facebooks, and googles, and also goodread and youtube. He lives at www.calebross.com.

Thank you and Happy Apocalypse!



OJET
ENA
2011





THE DARKNESS IS THICK.
IT IS SUFFOCATING,
OVERPOWERING, CHOKING.
A LIVING THING THAT PULSES,
THAT BREATHES,
THAT QUIVERS AT MY INTRUSION.



IT'S A DARKNESS YOU DID NOT
WALK THROUGH BUT RATHER
FIGHT THROUGH,
GET TURNED AROUND IN, LOST IN,
CONFUSED BY AND IN THE END,
ARE LEFT WONDERING
IF YOU EVER DID TRULY ESCAPE
IT UNTIL THE SUN RISES
THE NEXT MORNING.



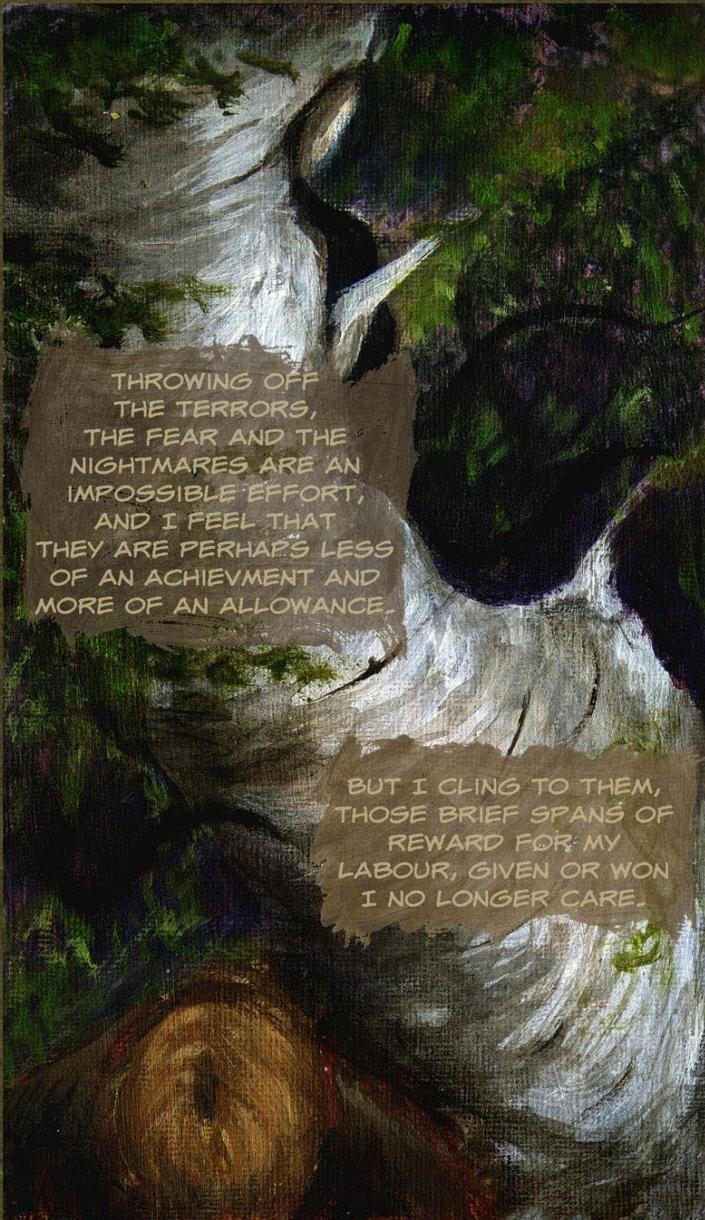
BUT THERE IS NO SUNRISE...

...NOT FOR ME...



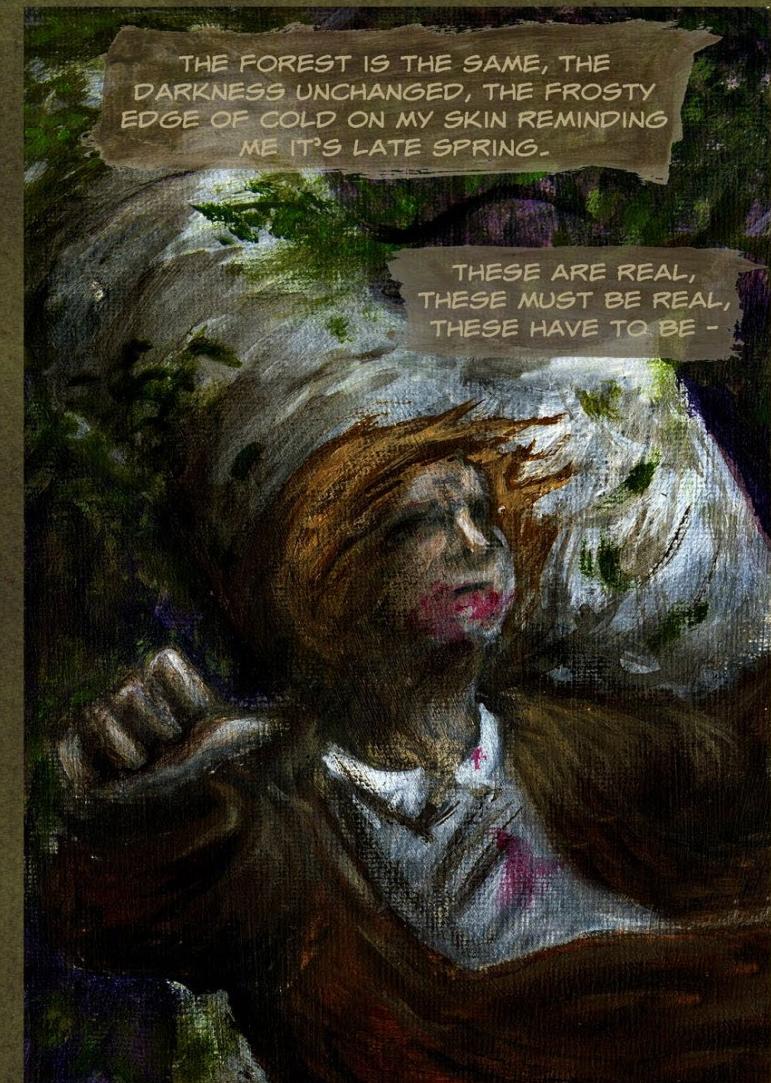


AWARENESS IS DIFFICULT,
TIRING AND RARE.



THE FOREST IS THE SAME, THE
DARKNESS UNCHANGED, THE FROSTY
EDGE OF COLD ON MY SKIN REMINDING
ME IT'S LATE SPRING.

THESE ARE REAL,
THESE MUST BE REAL,
THESE HAVE TO BE -



FALLING

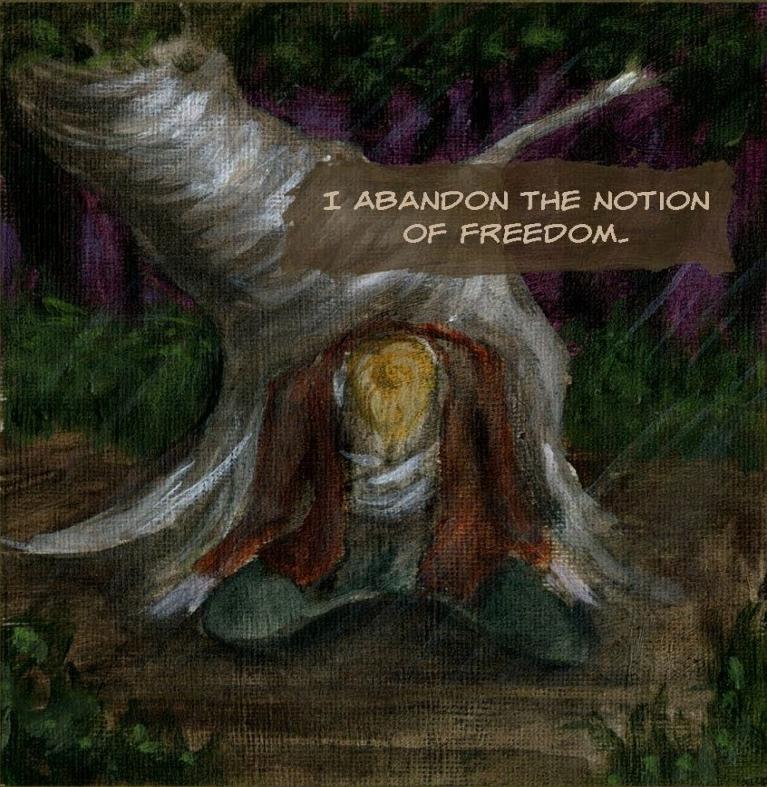
FALLING

FALLING

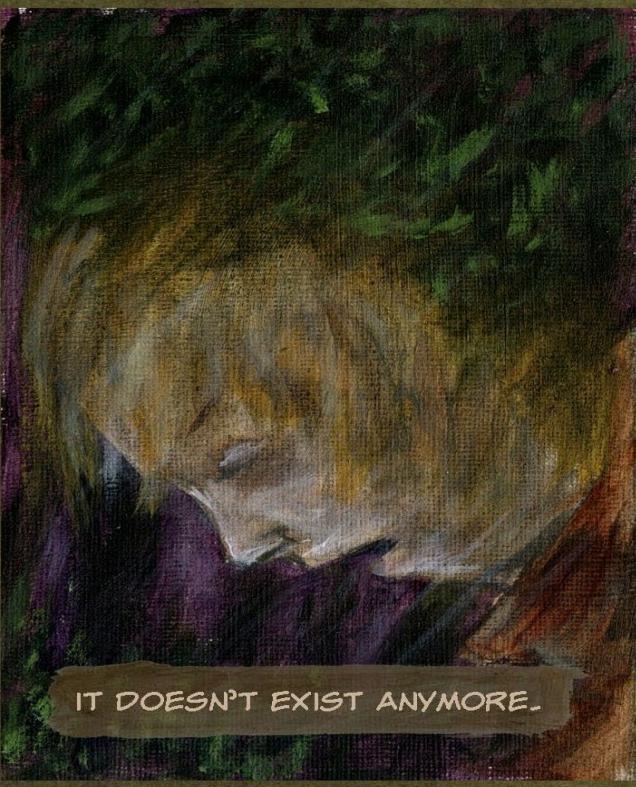
FALLING

FALLING

DIMENTI



I ABANDON THE NOTION
OF FREEDOM.



IT DOESN'T EXIST ANYMORE.

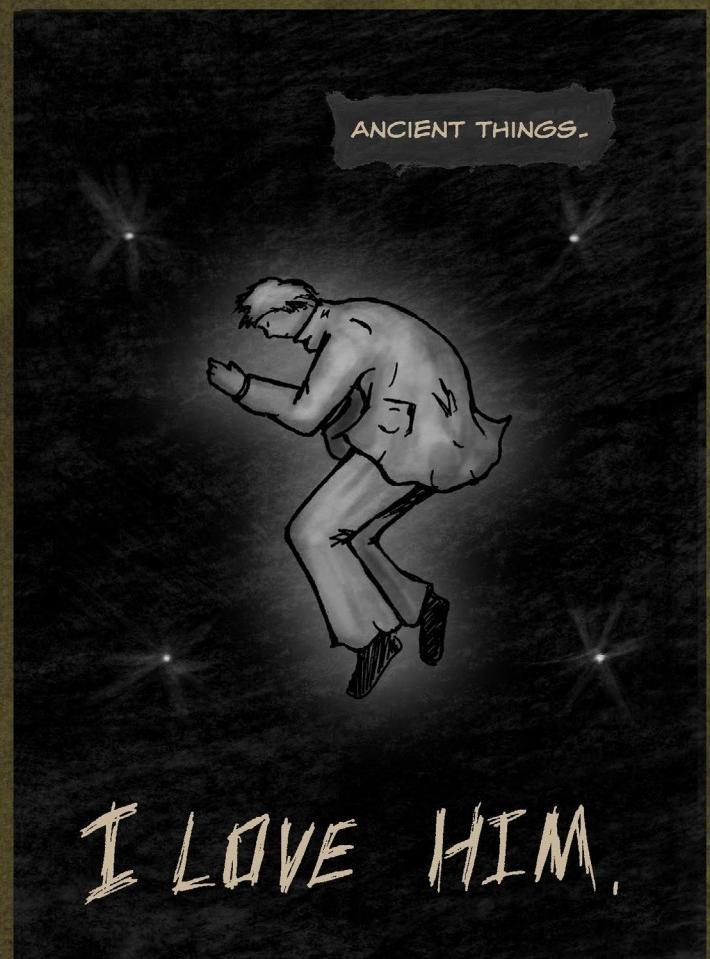
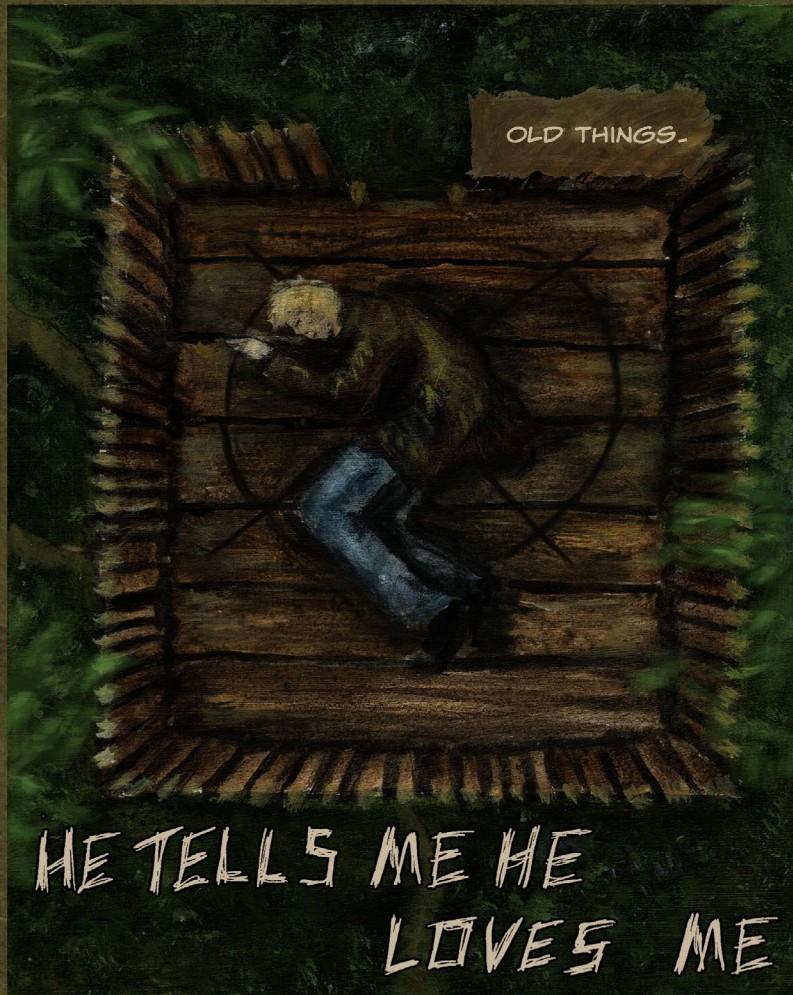
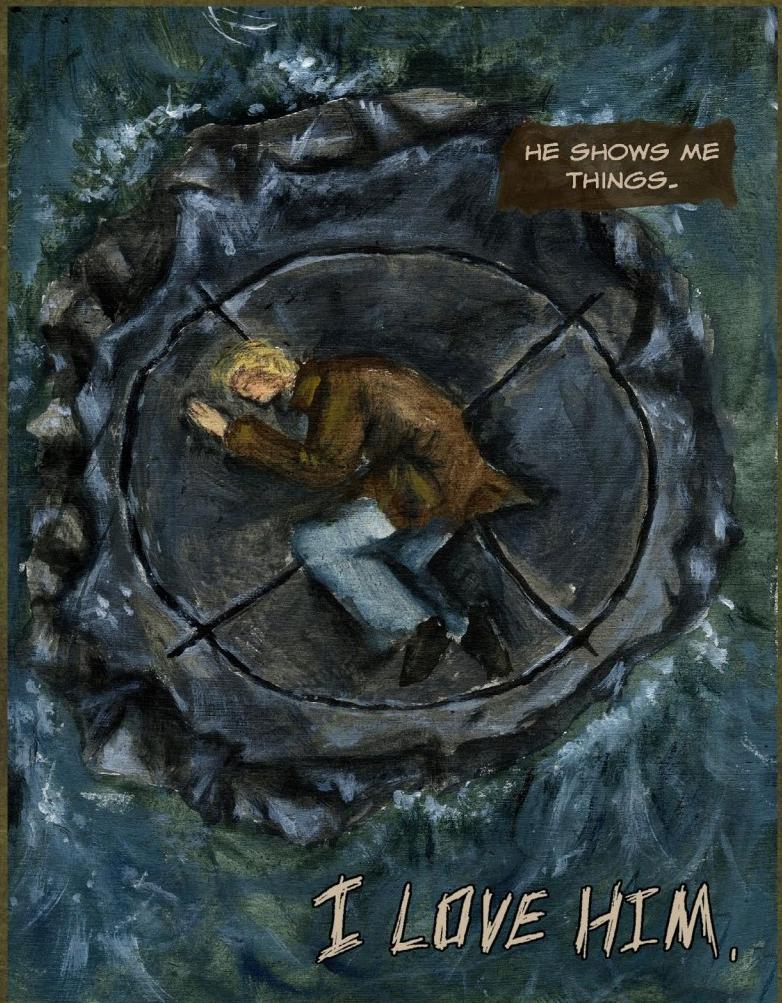
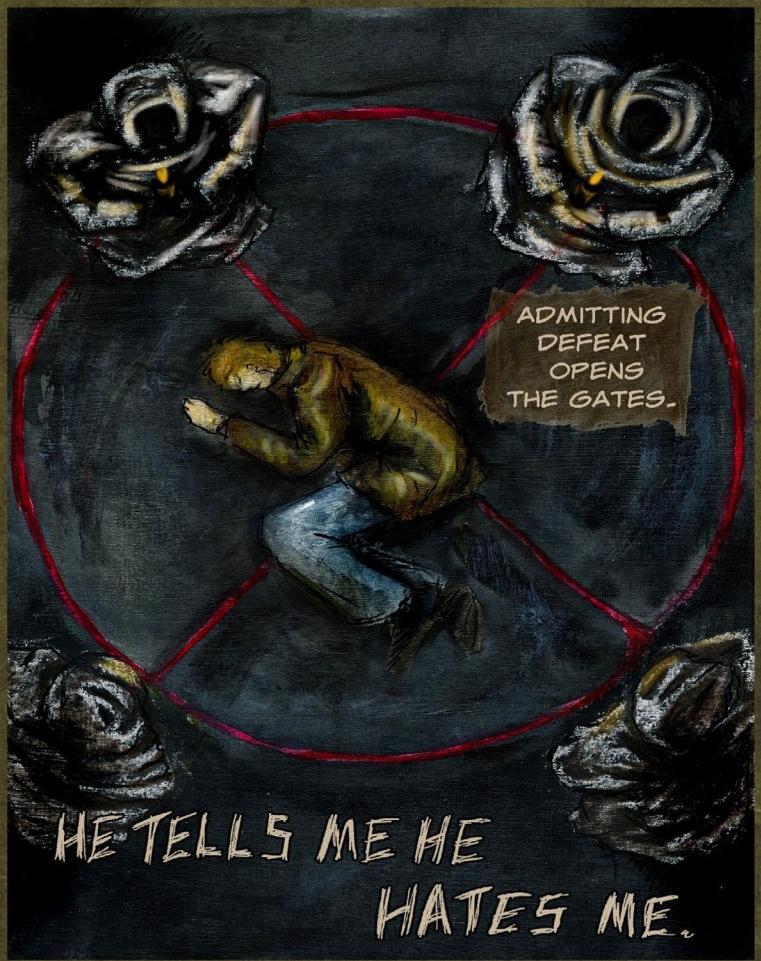


I CAN FIGHT ALL I WANT.



HE STILL WINS.

AND THAT MAKES HIM SMILE.



HE GIVES ME MOMENTS, BRIEF MOMENTS OF CLARITY. BUT THEY ARE NOT MINE. MY THOUGHTS ARE NOT MY OWN, BUT OF STAGGERING REALIZATION. MY ONLY PONDERING IS ON BARELY GRASPED KNOWLEDGE. MY EXISTENCE IN COMPARISON TO THIS...

I LOVE HIM.

I LOVE HI

THIS.
THIS EXPANSE
THIS UNKNOWABLE SPACE,
THIS INFINITE DARKNESS, THIS ANCIENT BLACKNESS BROKEN RANDOMLY BY POINTS OF OLD AND DECREPIT LIGHT, TOO LONG GONE FROM THEIR MAJESTY TO BE NAMED ANYTHING OTHER THAN A FALLEN WONDER WAITING TO DIE.

AND ALL THE TIME IS MUSIC. ANCESTRAL NOTES AND INCOMPREHENSIBLE STATIC IN EQUAL MEASURE. WHISPERING TO ME, SCREAMING TO ME.

CALLING TO ME.

THEY ARE SAYING SOMETHING BUT I CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT. THEY ALL TRY TO BE HEARD AT ONCE, AND SO ALL I CAN HEAR IS THEIR CLASHING, THEIR TITANIC STRUGGLE.

THEIR CHAOS.



HE WINS.



WU 2012

apocalypse

by Jeannine

Born from shadow
Nurtured in hell
Birthed at midnight
The little girl rises, smiling

Eyes, red as ruby
She walks in the snow
Dressed in jet black
A dark mist surrounding her

She can feel she is getting close
Humanity's rejection
Is palpable from distance

She does not need an army
For her weapon lies
In her misanthropy

Corruption is her motto
She will honor it
For as long as she exists

Forever

Immortal, but fallen
This angel has-been

Searches for a way
To wreak vengeance

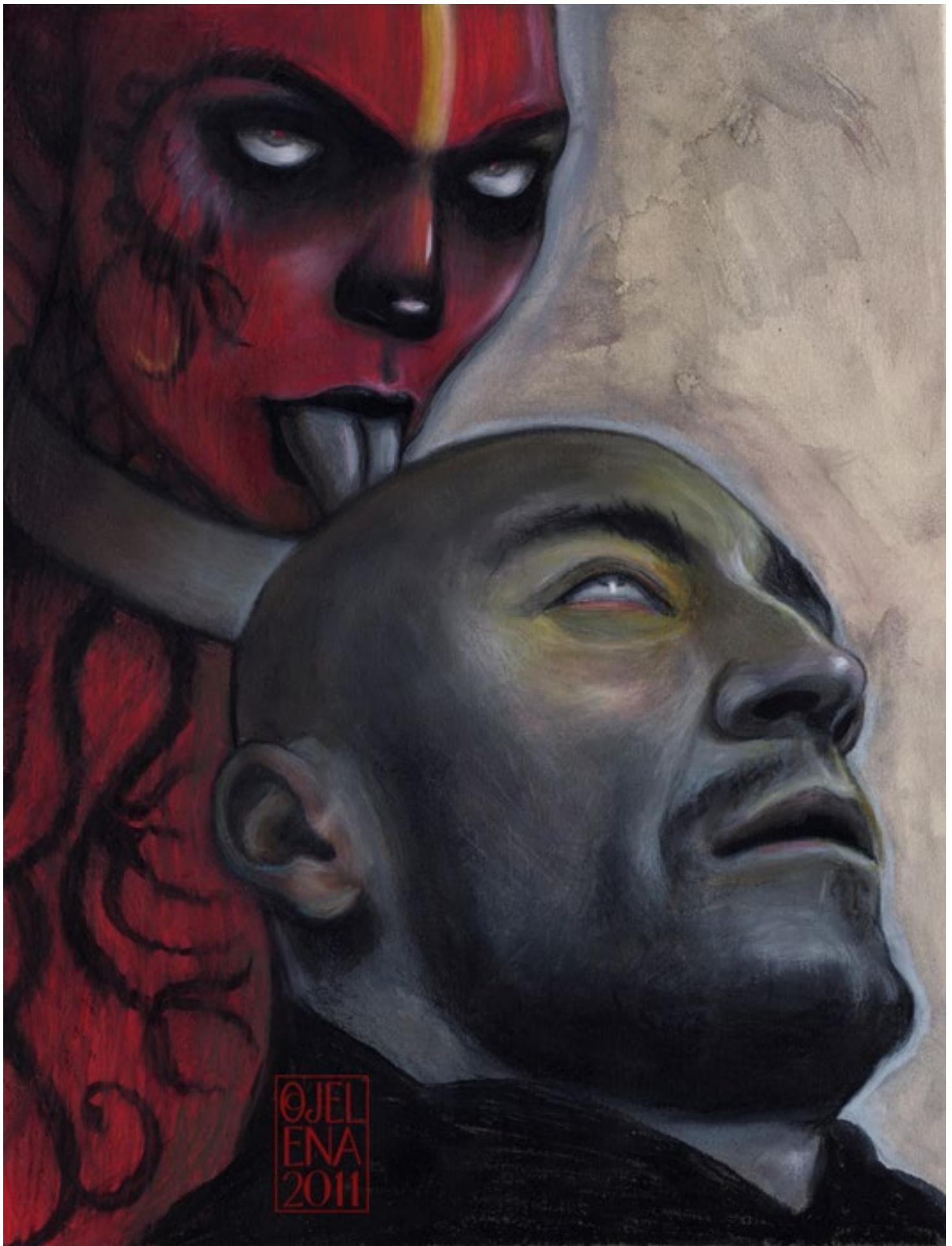
Indeed, she is determined
But soon, her quest will be laid to rest
For Humanity possesses
What she seeks most

Hope in a better future
Faith in themselves
And Love for the other
Humanity's long-forgotten weapon

Will Humanity ever remember?
Will we ever go back to our roots?
The little dark girl is getting closer
No one will be saved

She is a threat to all of us
She is one of us
She will live up to her name
She is

Apocalypse.



A FAIR TRADE

CAROLYN CHARRON

I think August is the worst month of the year. The blistering heat is magnified to the nth degree by the concrete jungle I live in. The rattle and clunk of the old air conditioner gives me a nasty headache. As soon as the sun disappears, sucking its heat below the horizon, I escape my small apartment. It is cooler under the tree canopy, cooler being a relative term. It's less hot than hell but it's definitely too hot for a picnic. Unless it's poolside.

I'm a city girl, lived here all my life. I got all the safety lectures from my mom and from school so I don't really have any excuse for being out, alone, at night. I was taught better, I *know* better. But I've been stuck inside for the past three days, stuck with that noisy machine that's supposed to cool the air but instead just moves it around. I am desperate for fresh air, desperate to get away from my claustrophobic apartment. I am stupid. I'm painting a target on my back but it seems worth the price.

I see him first as a murky darkness behind a tree. I think it's just another tree's shadow. But as I pass it, the shadow moves. I don't have a chance. I can't scream, can't run, can't do anything. I am caught in his web. I am completely fucked.

He throws his arm across my mouth, imprisoning my screams for help. His other hand grabs my t-shirt and hauls me backwards. I fling myself left and right in a frantic effort to break free. The keys I'd stuck between my fingers as a possible weapon fall to the ground with a fateful clink. My sneakers dig angry furrows in the sandy path and then through the leaf mold further under the trees. He drags me away from the lights, away from the people I can still see in the distance. They are a world away.

I bite at the hand that covers my mouth, tasting salt and blood. *Don't bite the hand that feeds you.* I have an insane urge to giggle.

He yanks his hand away, trailing a string of bloody saliva. His fist returns, slamming into my mouth, filling it with my own blood. I gag on the taste.

Suddenly, I am on the ground, stones digging into my back and the grass cool against my skin. He comes down hard on me, blotting out the small bit of light that shines through the trees. One meaty hand pinches my mouth shut. The other hand rips at my shorts, leaving stinging grooves behind on my belly. The

metallic zing of a zipper sounds like a death knell. I know what's next and am powerless to stop it. Tears leak from my eyes, drip into my hair. The stench of his sweat fills my nose until I want to vomit it out.

I twist and buck, fighting the inevitable. He isn't getting it easy. I am going to make it as difficult as possible. I scratch at his face, his arms, anything I can reach, trying to inflict as much damage as I can.

My knees part grudgingly to his hairy legs and the cooler air feels good against my overheated skin for a brief instant. Then he blocks off the breeze and shoves his way in.

"Oh god, get out! Get out!" I scream. But only a strangled whimper escapes my bloody lips.

Ah that feels good, look at her wiggle and squirm. She's so tight.

I freeze. What the fuck was that? My vision flickers. I feel disoriented. The woods lurch around me, gyrating wildly then they rock to a stop in a different configuration.

Something white glows in front of me. I see a young woman, twisting against hands that hold her down.

This is so good, she's sooo good, oh god, give it to me, give it to me...

The girl on the ground stops struggling, her eyes growing wider. I groan at the pressure in my groin, the heat. I feel enveloped by a wonderful sensation. I pump harder, the friction building, building, building to a crescendo.

Can't stop, cumming, cumming! Ahhh!

My balls draw up tight and let go. A tidal wave sweeps over me and I lose myself for a moment in the bliss of release.

I pull out, the air feels so cold after her warmth. I want to smile at the girl below me but know she won't understand how wonderful this is. They never do. That's the only part I hate. They never understand that I can't help it. They show off their breasts, hips, thighs. They shouldn't be allowed to flaunt their bodies like that, tempting me. They were asking for it. I had needs. They should give me what I want. If they'd only give it to me, I wouldn't have to take it from them.

A small gasp catches my attention. Her wide eyes stare up into mine as I roll off her body. I blink down at her.

Flicker, flicker, flicker. The gyroscope sweeps over me again and when it recedes, I am looking up at him.

Oh, jesus, what the fuck was that? Is that what he feels like? I scuttle away, crablike. He doesn't follow or try to grab me, he just watches me go with unreadable eyes. Panting, I crouch against a tree, staring at him. I can still feel his skin against mine. Can still feel *his* orgasm rippling through me. Can still feel the velvety

warmth gripping body parts that I don't have. God, I can still feel the tightening in *my balls as I orgasmed*.

My stomach empties itself. Acid burns into my nostrils, tears, mucous and vomit streaming down my face. I swipe the back of my hand across my mouth, wiping away the foulness.

I can feel his eyes crawling on me like ants. I shudder and met his gaze. Round, black holes reflect my horror back at me. He cringes away from me, hugging himself tightly. His penis hangs flaccid outside his pants. It doesn't look so threatening now as it peeks out from under his arms. His entire body shivers violently.

I'd felt him, felt everything that he'd felt as he raped me. And looking at him shaking, traumatized, in a half-naked huddle on the ground, I knew he'd felt every unwanted stroke, every painful throb he'd put between my legs. Knew that he'd been the victim, this time.

I crawl to my ripped panties and shorts and dress as best as I can. He's still rocking back and forth, whispering quietly, urgently.

"I'm sorry, oh god, I'm so sorry. I didn't know. I didn't know."

Holding my ripped shorts closed, I walk away without a backward glance, leaving him to the horror of being violated.

It seems a fair trade to leave him there, sniveling. I hurt on the outside and he can hurt on the inside.

I wonder if I can make it happen again. There are a lot of rapists out there who just don't get it, haven't learned that what goes around, comes around. So to speak.



Sliver

A. E. Doyle

They say that if you stand in front of a wall of glass at exactly four minutes past midnight and tap your fingers on it three times, you can open a door to the void beyond this world. It has to be somewhere you can see your reflection, and see through it, hovering like a ghost over the darkness beyond, somewhere dim enough that you can't quite tell the difference between light and shade. And unless you hit the glass where you touched it, shatter the half-formed image before the fifth minute strikes, that door will never close.

Celia Gray has never been one for urban legends. So much so, that she would never turn down a chance to prove one wrong.

The girls are in the middle of their third round of Truth Or Dare when it's brought up for the first time.

“No way!”

“Come on, Angie, it’s almost midnight!”

“No, Tracey.”

“What’s wrong, scared?”

“No, I—I just ...it’s my house! I’m not smashing my balcony door.”

“Jeez, guys.” The five faces turn at the third voice. “We’re fourteen now, not six. You don’t really think it would work, do you?”

“You wanna do it instead then, Ciel?”

Celia rolls her eyes at the chorus of ooh’s and ahh’s. She doesn’t even take a moment before standing up and walking the three steps to the door, staring through depths of her own floating form.

The night is still and warm. Twelve o’clock strikes as the haphazard circle of floppy sleeping bags and bright pyjamas whispers and giggles among themselves. A light breeze seems to kick up as the first minute passes, though the hanging branches of the limp trees outside remain still. At two past midnight, Tracey reaches over to dim the lamp, casting the room into a grey-orange glow. By the third minute, the ticking of the mantel clock is ringing out like a heartbeat as every other sound hushes to silence.

As the fourth minute comes, Celia reaches forward with a single hand and raps her knuckles on the cool glass an inch above her mirrored face.

Once. Twice. Three times.

No one moves. Then, Angie screams.

Celia bursts into laughter halfway through her leap, shaking as she tackles her friend.

“Aww, did you think I was possessed?”

Angie scowls for several seconds before giving up and joining the others in snickering.

No one sees the flicker in the glass the split-second before Celia turns away. No one sees the wry twist on the mouth of her reflection that doesn't quite match up with reality.

A few days later, Celia is pacing with a phone pressed between her ear and her shoulder. The girl on the other end is yapping on about some party she "absolutely must go to," one with older boys, in the warehouse, all night. Celia is considering her options when she catches sight of herself in the mirror and stops in her tracks..

In the pale light, she could have sworn that there was something behind her. A shadow with her face, and with a body bleeding and bruised, wearing a dress torn with red.

"You know what, no thanks. I think I'm going to sleep about now," she says into the receiver, and hangs up.

When the same girl calls again the next morning from the hospital, babbling about a fight, a riot, Celia tries to tell herself that she was just more tired than she'd thought.

She's still not superstitious. She grows up, graduates. She pretends she didn't pick her job because of a flash in her kitchen window of a car and a house she hadn't thought she'd be able to afford.

It works out well, very well, and she gets a place of her own. It's a nice suite, with glass all down one wall, looking out over the city and the inky sky. She covers the other walls with mirrors.

Celia checks herself every morning, and every time before she walks out the door. Checks her hair, her make-up, her clothes, and the dark shade that hangs at the corner of her vision.

It's years after that night when the dreams start coming. Not nightmares, not quite. But when she slips off into the emptiness of sleep, all she sees are shadows, and darkness that extends out through every corner. She dreams of lines, threads of fate branching, spreading out into millions upon millions of times. It's beautiful, in its sharp, terrifying way. Beautiful like she is, or at least what she seems.

A person never sees themselves in the mirror, not really. They see who they think they see, expect to see, want to see.

Reflections aren't just pictures, they're doorways. Into possibility, into things that aren't, into the shadowspaces.

Celia Gray is just a woman. But what looks back from the glass, she isn't so sure.

She's in her office, chatting to one of her friends when she breaks off without even a gasp.

It's worse than that first time, because it's not herself. It's him in the window, half his face scraped off, limbs twisted. But it's all just an impression, a trick of the light, because it's nothing compare to the sudden phantom cold that pierces her.

As they leave that afternoon, he's one step behind her as they cross the road. She whips around as a car skids through the lights, barely in time to push him out of the way.

But just in time to see the shock on his face as he stumbles back into the path of a truck speeding in the opposite direction.

It's no surprise to Celia that she looks beautiful in black too. She pushes back through her front door after the funeral, and after the hours she's spent walking aimlessly after it. Through winding streets, across town, but not near the river—nothing that reflects.

The foyer mirror is a gaping hole before her. It's late, she doesn't know how late, and she doesn't care. There's barely any light, but she still sees. She always sees.

In the shadow, she's wasting away. Hair limp, skin waxy, bags that hang like weights under her eyes. And it's

those eyes that catch her, blank, empty.

Did she help him? Did she kill him? Does it matter?

Anger, bright, hot anger races through her in a violent pulse. In an instant she's stepping forward, smashing her hand into the glass.

The shards slice into her fist, blood pouring onto the creamy linoleum. She keeps pounding, again, and again, until the silver screen falls away from the wooden back, until there's nothing left to see.

There's a strange feeling in her, and within the walls. It's a little like a fog has been lifted, like something slipping away.

Celia looks down at her ravaged hand, blinking once as the watch on her wrist flips to 12:05.

The dreams stop.

The world, as such, continues to turn.

Celia quits her job, gets another one without too much difficulty. She makes some good decisions, some bad, her own. She moves out and buys another place where she doesn't bring in a single mirror, and installs blinds over every window.

But the balcony door, she leaves.

She looks in it, through it, sometimes, late at night when she's making her way to bed. She lets her eyes fall on the figure gazing back, half transparent against the night, pale, shuttered, normal.

And sometimes there's almost a flicker of something else, some more. Something waiting to be let in again.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

Cerebral Psychosis:



A Gallery by Elle Gottzi



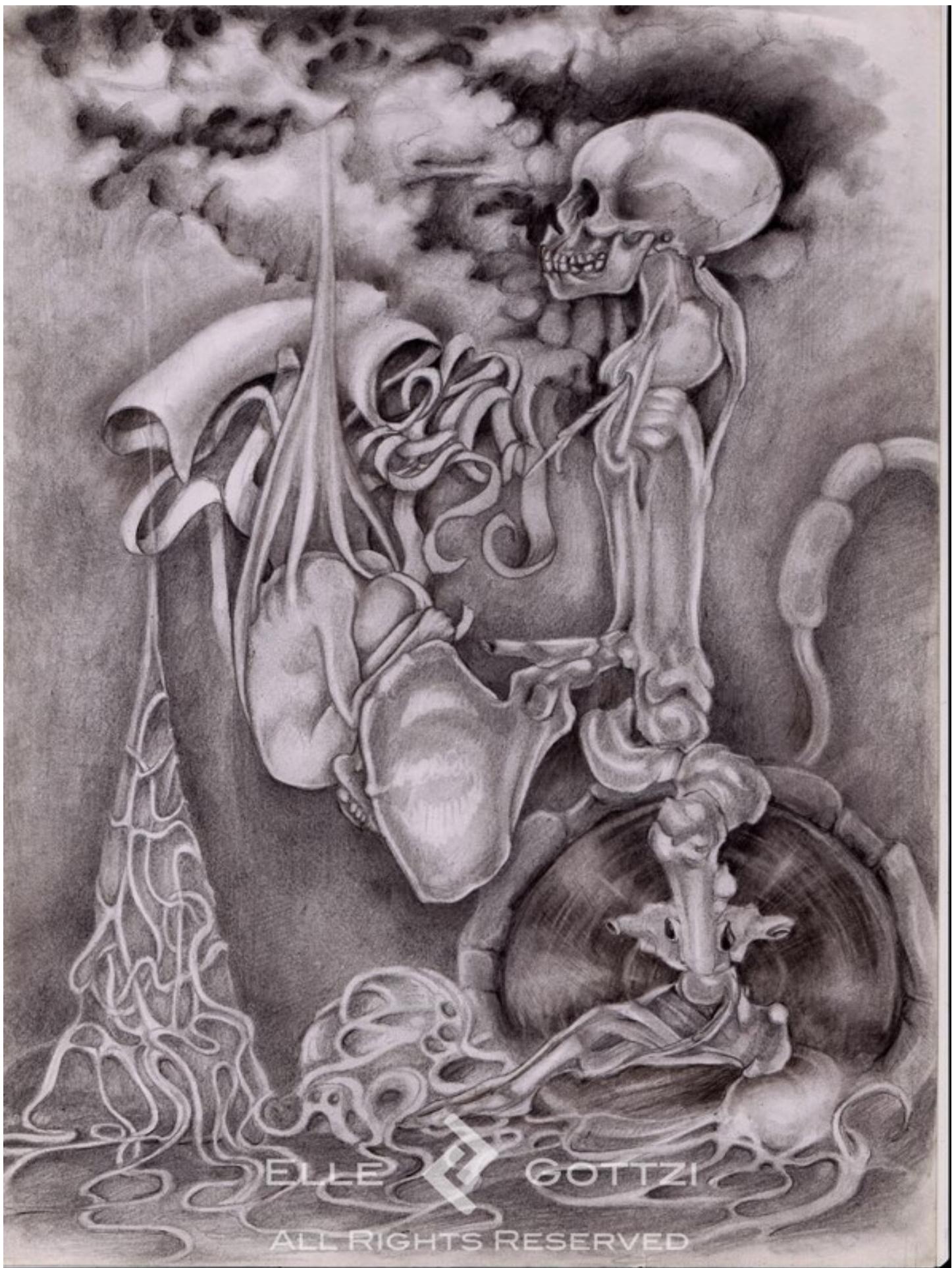
Elle Gottzi 2012

<http://ellegottzi.deviantart.com/>



ELLE X GOTTLI





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OTHER

BY LAJANN

Meadow Creek Pediatrics treated newborns through age six, so limiting the spread of infection was sometimes a challenge. Children would arrive for appointments, some holding the hand of one parent, while the other hand extended a finger to poke into a red, runny nose. A few would be coughing and sneezing, making no effort and having no care to cover their mouth or wipe their nose as they played with the lobby toys or read the complimentary books. *Robbie's Royal Recorder* and *Run, Johnny, Run!* were caked in yellowy-green goo by the end of the day, with each thick cardboard page handled by twenty or more children in the space of eight hours. If it wasn't the children being brought in that carried infection, it was the parents that were spreading it around as they thumbed through magazines and journals.

Tick.

It wasn't the germs that concerned Anna; it was something else. It started as an itch that crawled along the inside curve of her skull. A worm that traveled between the matter and bone. She could never entirely figure out what caused it, or even what could be done about it, but not a day passed during the last sixty days where it didn't plague her.

Tick.

At first it was easy enough to ignore; a momentary distraction, but usually occurring at a moment where her focus was needed most. This often happened at work. Anna would try to pass it off like it was nothing. She would casually turn her head to look around, feeling that something was there, but upon noticing that nothing was, returned to her business.

And business was booming. It was the winter cold season, after all. During that time of the year, overtime was pretty much expected. Anna would arrive at work at six in the morning to prepare rooms and charts, then leave at six in the evening after all appointments were taken care of.

Tick.

It would continue when she would finally get home. She had to make dinner for her husband, who lounged around the house day after day, having been laid off from his job four months earlier. Frowning, she would say little to him on her way to the kitchen, trying to avoid the glimpse of his rotund posterior glued onto the blue, patterned couch. Glassy, vacant eyes stared straight into the television while one unwashed hand raised a nearly empty beer bottle to his lips and the other hand scratched a fine layer of stubble along his jaw.

...now

A small collection of other beer bottles would be waiting for her attention when she was done with dinner; some had made their way to the kitchen, close but not entirely inside the trash can, while the others would hang close to the man that made their day by planting those lips atop their heads.

...wash

When Chuck was not on an alcohol-induced autopilot, he was not the most supportive and loving man to be around. He would make sure to tell Anna just how unappealing and worthless she had become, adding insult to her emotional injury by relocating his backside to the computer room and closing the door.

...wash

She knew what it was for and why he escaped in there, and she didn't have the strength to confront him about it. Ultimately, she reasoned, if he was in there, then she didn't have to bother with his abuse--or his abusive smell.

After a time, the mildly annoying uneasiness became even more distracting. It went from being a undefined *something* to be more of a hush or whisper. Sometimes she could make out what the words were saying, and sometimes it would feel more like she only caught the tail end of a conversation.

...so many

A last syllable, or a quieted bit of gossip. And as before, she would turn to see who was speaking and see no one there to take the blame. Anna would be in the middle of taking a temperature or checking the heart beat of a newborn and the whisper would come about, causing her to look away and have to repeat the procedure all over again. Co-workers and patients at the practice started to wonder if she was okay.

...you must

There was one particular time where she swore she had heard someone speak to her. She would *swear* that someone was there! Inside her ears (or was it her mind?) the words were so loud that she dropped her clipboard, startling a sleeping infant and setting in motion a long-lasting crying session.

...wash away all of those horrible germs!

Anna was asked to take the rest of the day off, and she was grateful for the opportunity. It would allow her a three day weekend. She could catch up on some housework, and hopefully rest her mind a bit. Between work and home, she had obviously just been too stressed out.

When she arrived home that day, she was greeted by the sight of a family of empty beer bottles, which had been haphazardly sprawled and arranged around the entire living room and kitchen. There was a trail of vomit that led through the hall toward the bathroom, beginning at the base of the couch. The cushions of the couch had several wet stains spread across them, and a few had been pulled off of the couch frame entirely.

...dirty

Anna sighed and sat down on a chair in the dining room and rubbed her temples. There was a dull ache that had started to throb there, and she had a vague uneasiness rise within her. Anna started to feel like someone was behind her.

She looked around and saw no one, but again the whisper came, barely audible, "...so dirty..."

Anna tried to ignore the feeling and rubbed her eyes, the weight of her task heavy on her mind. She would have to clean up the mess and still find time to make dinner. "Tylenol..." she muttered almost silently. She rose to her feet and followed the trail of vomit to the bathroom, where she intended to dig out the acetaminophen from the medicine cabinet, then wander into the bedroom where she'd lay down for a bit and rest until the pain passed.

When she got there, however, there was a large body blocking access: that of her husband.

...clean

During his storm of inebriation, he had managed to pass out while offering to the porcelain goddess. As a further tithe, he left the grounds littered with his urine, feces, and stray vomit.

...filth!

Anna was livid, but too tired and in too much pain. She called to Chuck, raising her voice and causing the ache in her head to increase, "For Christ's sake, Chuck, get up! You're a mess!" Her husband only mumbled, spreading a bit of saliva and vomit remnant to coat a previously unscathed patch of tile with his lips. "Shit." It was clear to her that she would have to get him into the tub and wash him off.

She withdrew to her bedroom and removed her work clothes, then returned to the bathroom in just her bra and panties. Tucking her fingers inside the bottom of his shirt, she lifted it up past his chest and over his arms. This took some effort (and several minutes) as he was laying prone on the floor. By the time she had weaved her hands around his waist to begin on his shorts, her head was pounding and her vision somewhat blurred.

...those horrible germs!

Anna paused and looked around, her husband's soiled shorts half past his ass and her own barely-clad bum showing proudly. There was no one there. "What in God's name..." she breathed.

She returned to her task and took up the clothing to toss into the laundry hamper. Once that was done, she anchored herself to her husband's armpits and pulled with all of her might. Anna's head felt like it was going to explode, but she pushed through it and, little by little, managed to slump her rag doll of a husband over the rim of the tub.

...wash away

Her hands and forearms were covered in the vomit that wiped off from his chest and arms, and it was then as she lifted up his lower half to swing it into the tub, that the stench in the bathroom reached an apex.

Anna felt suddenly very nauseous. The bathroom was a cacophony of appalling scents: dirty, unwashed husband; urine and feces; vomit and beer.

...so many germs!

And the migraine that was filling her head only made her stomach revolt more. She swung her head around to the toilet and grasped the rim, her nails matching the ivory color of the goddess' complexion. Traces of breakfast and all of her lunch came forth just as she was able to glimpse the offerings in the bowl, which only served to help propel the contents of her stomach more forcefully. She crouched there with her head splitting and drool hanging in strings from her lips, not wanting to touch her knees to the floor, until the urge finally passed. When it eventually did, she wiped her mouth with the back of her hand, rose to her feet, and took a step to the tub to continue her task.

That step faltered. The foot that set down slipped on a patch of brown and yellow vomit and she fell backwards, landing soundly on her back and hitting her head on the tile. There was a sharp sound akin to a billiard ball hitting another; there was a moment of intense, dull pain that filled her head, and a flash of white in front of her eyes; and then there was nothing.

**

...so many germs!

“Wha...?” she mumbled, roused an hour later from unconsciousness by the voice.

...horrible germs!

“Wherr... who are you?” she asked nothing. Her vision was still blurry and unfocused, but slowly came under her control again within moments.

But you must get rid of the filth!

Anna shakily pushed herself to sitting. There was a trickle of blood oozing down the back of her neck, some of which had made a spectacular tissue paper sort of painting on the tile. She looked to the tub where her husband continued to lay in his own waste, snoozing off the alcohol and mumbling incoherently. She reached back and touched the bleeding, tender back of her head and winced; her head was a concert of pain. “Holy shit... Tylenol.” she groaned.

Anna stood up and reached out to open the medicine cabinet, her eyes catching only a glimpse of what seemed to be her reflection in the mirror on its swing towards her. She closed the door and opened the cap to the bottle, shook out a couple of capsules, then went to raise them to her mouth. That was when her eyes caught her reflection. She screamed, fingers releasing the bottle and capsules alike. The small red and white medicine rolled down into the drain.

...get rid of the filth!

Showing from the mirror was Anna’s reflection, covered entirely in oversized microbes. No inch was spared, from the top of her light brown hair to her waist where the reflection ended; it was all a carpet of squirming, moving germs. She screamed again and began to wipe her face and arms with imaginary washcloths. She smoothed her hair to the ends and then repeated, hoping to strip them clean. But they remained, crawling over her in a sort of strange dance. The reflection insisted again, its voice almost pleasantly urgent, “Wash away all of those horrible germs!”

She looked around at the rest of the bathroom, and it too was covered with the creatures. Chuck was practically drowning in them as he slumbered in the tub. Frantic, she stuck her head out of the bathroom and looked around. There was virtually no place visible that was not crawling with germs.

Anna’s head was pounding so hard that she thought she might crumble from the pain, but all she could really think about was the germs. She was surrounded by germs! She turned back around, intent on taking another look into the mirror, but the face in the mirror was standing right there, staring back at her. Its imploring eyes reached out to her as it said, “Get rid of the filth! Now...”

Tears formed in Anna’s own, brought from the pain and the fear. “Who in hell *are* you?!” she screamed.

Tick. The woman in front of her faded some, as if a hand had been waved in front of a projector.

“The germs,” it repeated, “...must get rid of the filth! ...horrible germs!”

Anna was sobbing then. Her vision was becoming blurry once more, and not just from tears. “What can I do?”

she asked.

Tick.

The Other floated past her and went into the kitchen. Anna followed her on wobbly legs, pausing to support her steps with a doorway here and a piece of furniture there. The image smiled, opened up a cabinet and held up a large bottle of bleach and an equally large bottle of ammonia.

“So dirty!” it said.

Anna accepted the cleaners and watched, dizzy, as the woman flitted past her again and returned to the bathroom, where it stood by the tub and waited. She stumbled back to the bathroom, using the jugs to balance like she was performing a high wire act. She looked to the figure and the Other repeated, “So dirty! There are so many germs!” In her state of mind, Anna didn’t note that the woman sounded like a 50’s detergent commercial. “...horrible!”

The figure pointed to the mass in the tub. The mass snorted in its sleep and mumbled, “...bitch.”

Through her pain haze, Anna placed the ammonia down on the edge of the tub, and removed the cap from the bleach. She then bent over to lift the switch that would close the drain, and looked down at her microbe-covered husband. He was just slithering, so entirely wrapped in the critters that she couldn’t even see his flesh. The scent of the bleach was already tickling her nose when she finally tilted the bottle over and poured the fluid onto him. She continued standing there, almost entirely stone-still, until all of the bleach had emptied out. Chuck wrinkled his nose and mumbled again in his sleep. He rolled over onto his back, his body not quite registering that he had been doused with anything, but still seeing fit to release a fresh batch of urine.

...so dirty!

When Anna bent over to pick up the bottle of ammonia, she noticed another large bottle of bleach, and yet another bottle of ammonia resting next to it.

Tick.

She looked up at the figure that led her to retrieve the items the first time, and there was a sick sort of smile present on the woman’s face. “So dirty!” it said again. Confused, and still very frightened at the germs everywhere, she opened the second bottle of bleach and poured it out into the tub as well.

Anna reached down for the ammonia and found the caps already off. The smell of the bleach was nearly overpowering. She took hold of both of the remaining bottles and held them above her husband, pausing to block her nose with one arm. Her eyes were fuzzy with tears as she emptied them into the tub; they stung from the fumes.

Tick. The projection flickered. The Other was quickly becoming a ghost.

It didn’t take long for the fumes to have an effect. Chuck was awoken with wheezing and coughing, the chemicals brought deep into his lungs from the steady in-out of breathing while sleeping. He also became aware of his throat burning, and turned over in the tub, slinging one arm over the side to try and work his form out of it. This only served to make him inhale the fumes more, slowing down any progress. Air was like fire, whether inhaled through his nose or his mouth. Anna, too, was being weakened by the toxic gas.

Tick.

She slowly dropped to her hands and knees, covering them with bile and other fluids that still coated the floor. Her dripping, burning eyes glanced to the tile and she witnessed more scurrying germs, some seemingly making a break for greener pastures. But she had not really managed to get rid of any of them; they were going to remain no matter what she did. It appeared that all she managed to do is get rid of one germ: her husband. All breathing from him had ceased. He had only managed to make it a third of the way out of the tub.

Tick.

“Your husband and family will love you for it...” the Other whispered, then disappeared completely, taking her repetitious, faux 50’s commercial tone with her.

Anna no longer noticed the pain in her head. It had been replaced by the fire in her lungs and the burning in her eyes. And soon after, there wasn’t even that.

**

The very next day, back in the lobby back at Anna’s place of work, a small television played an advertisement during the break of a new children’s show called *Old MacDonald’s Farm*. A smiling woman stood in the middle of a modestly-furnished kitchen, beaming white teeth and waving her hands over a cleaning product. Her ruby red lips, cheery yellow dress with apron, and smart hairstyle suggested the makers of the commercial were going for a 50’s sort of feel.

A worker at the practice by the name of Cheryl sat behind the counter at the appointment desk, scribbling numbers and notes into the file of a four-year-old that had come in with chicken pox, and looked up to the television, distracted by the actress on the screen. The actress said:

It’s easy to let chores get away from you, but you mustn’t! Food will leave all sorts of bacteria on your counters and sinks. Things can get so dirty; there are so many germs! But you must get rid of the filth! With Parker’s Sparkle and Shine, you can wash away all of those horrible germs and leave your home clean and smelling wonderful! Your husband and family will love you for it!

A parent rose from their seat and changed the channel. An assistant behind the desk frowned and changed it back with the remote which was kept there. There was a distinct “tick” sound made when it flipped over.

Cheryl continued to gaze at the screen for a moment, seemingly blanking out, then came out of it when she suddenly had the feeling that someone was behind her. She looked around but saw no one. Taking a deep breath, she rolled her head around on her shoulders to loosen up some of the tension there, and then stood up. Another patient was waiting.

Tick.



DAMIEN WORM ★ 2011



Jel Ena
www.jel-ena.com

THE COCK OF THE PISTOL

TIM TOBIN

The gravity of the massive comet nudged Earth closer to the sun and after two years scientists determined that the situation was hopeless.

The average temperature quickly rose by fifteen degrees and the sun's gravity relentlessly pulled the atmosphere into space. Within months, the Earth would become barren with no air to breathe and no water to drink.

Robert and Gillian Lambert took refuge in a cave with water and then they watched the underground river become a stream and then a trickle. When the slightest exertion caused them to gasp for breath they knew their end was very near.

They made love unenergetically one last time. They briefly reminisced about sunlit spring days. They spoke of things that had been and others that could not be. Gillian cried for children she had not borne but rejoiced that Bob needed only two bullets. Both got melancholy and nodded. Really, the time had come.

Bob cocked the pistol.

He looked to his wife for final approval. She took his hands and raised the gun to her forehead. She whispered, "I love you." Bob's heart broke as he put his finger on the trigger.

Just as he was about to fire, he heard a noise, a human voice, people, marauders! Instinctively he pulled the gun away from Gillian. They listened. The rare atmosphere no longer carried sound very well but there was a faint aroma of smoke and burning flesh.

Food!

Bob hid the pistol under some ratty blankets and retrieved the shotgun. Gillian took his arm gently and asked if this changed anything. Bob agreed that it didn't but he really wanted to know about the rest of the world.

So they started down the steep hill staying behind boulders and trees, camouflaging themselves from any eyes that might look up the hill. Finally they saw a fire and a sight so horrible Gillian retched audibly.

Three humans huddled around a small fire that struggled to stay lit. They were roasting and eating the half-cooked flesh of other marauders Bob had killed.

The woman looked pregnant. She had a water bottle in her hand but there was no water in it. She was draining blood from the bodies and drinking the vile liquid.

The two men and the women vomited uncontrollably from the near raw food. The three lay on the ground panting for breath. The exertion of eating and vomiting took a huge toll on their remaining endurance.

Bob carefully approached the woman who lay at his feet barely able to breathe or even move. He raised the shotgun and she squealed and drew into the fetal position.

She whimpered, "No, please, not my baby."

Bob stepped a few feet away and fired the shotgun directly into her head. She died without a sound. Bob dispatched the men quickly without stopping to think about the murders he committed.

The ascent back up the hill took hours but finally they were back in their cave.

The two shots came in quick succession.



Tall Tales with Short Cocks

VOL. 2: A REVIEW BY GARRETT DAVIS



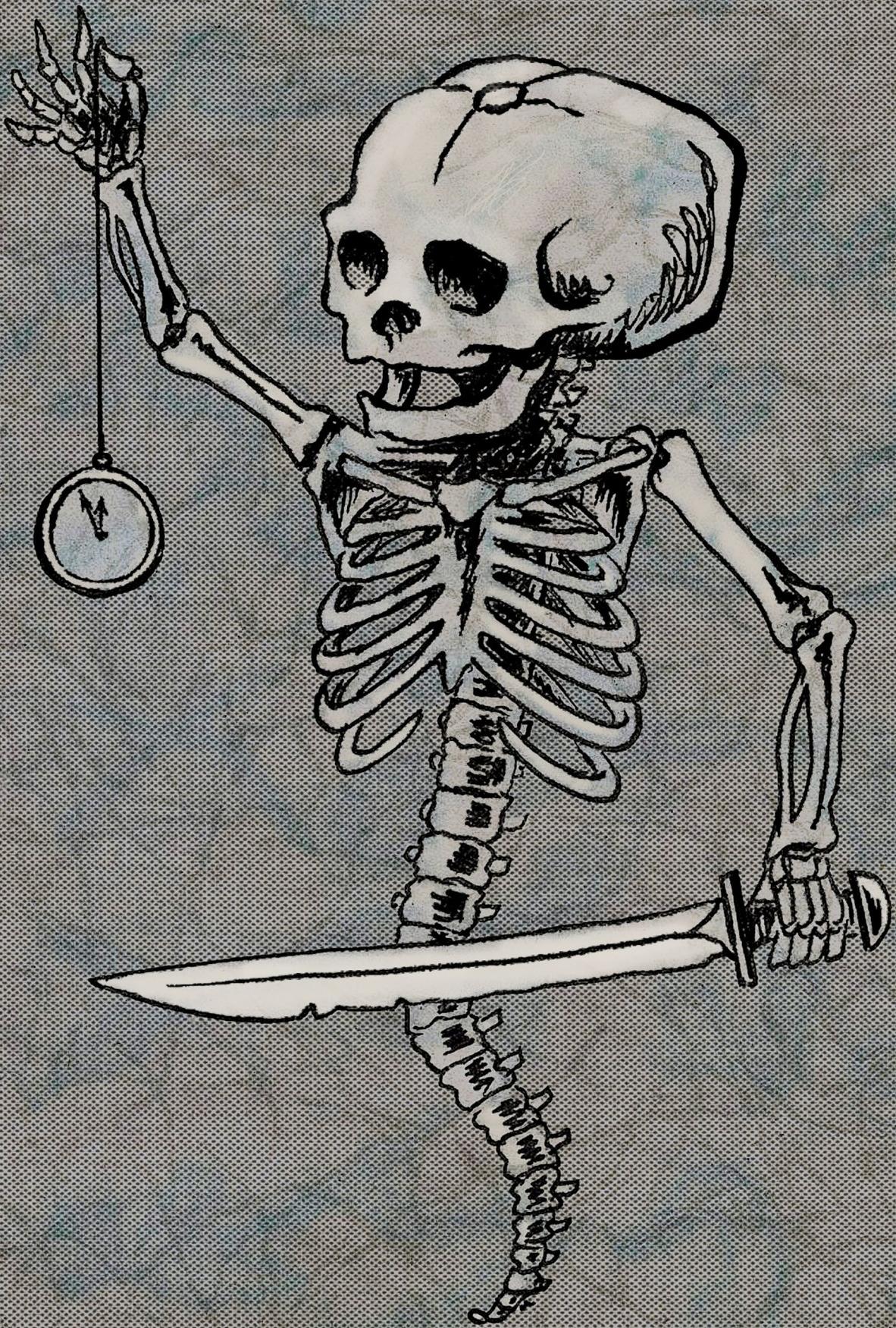
Everyone knows the feeling of waking up from a particularly strange dream with a desire to tell someone about it. So you phone up your friend, maybe roll over to inform your significant other or perhaps just open a journal to write the dream down and find that you can't. It just doesn't come out right and the more you explain it the less you feel your point is coming across. This was the feeling experienced after having finished reading the second volume of *Tall Tales with Short Cocks*. Charged with absurdities, anger and off kilter sexuality, this collection of fifteen bizarro short stories had me mumble WTF under my breath as much as it had me smile with enjoyment.

The first tale "The Ballad of Billy the Squid" is about a boy who has an octopus where his head should be. It sends a message right away as to what the volume is going to be like: His head is an octopus; get over it. In fact having a face like Davy Jones ends up being our hero's ticket out of a mundane work life at his oppressive father's car wash, when a Japanese porn tycoon hires him on to do tentacle porn. There are more grounded tales within the collection as well. One of these, particularly interesting ones being about two guys, testing the unwritten rules of the men's

washroom, prodding each other's footwear from beneath the stall doors. A boy with a sea creature for a head is just one of the many colorful characters met within the pages of the volume. Others include: A corpse who remakes her body using the contents of a candy store, Oxy: a sphincter eyed cross-universal marathon runner, a disfigured whore named Walrus Sounds who (get this) can speak walurssian and many others.

Du ex machina is a writing device generally avoided by many authors and disliked by an audience but in at least three different instances I found myself hoping it would show up. This is due to the fact that, like a dream, I was just getting into it when the story abruptly ended. I had to do a double take and make sure my hand hadn't slipped and accidentally skipped a page. The whole plot had been set up, faced with global extinction a time loop is established creating a Groundhog Day like sequence of events thus saving everyone that would have perished. However, should the main character consume any fast food the time loop would break and calamity would once again fall upon the inhabitants of Earth. But that is essentially all the reader gets because that's where the story ends. It's as if there was not enough motivation to continue writing. It becomes a major pitfall for the collection as three if not more of its tales end this way.

That's not to say that everything is doom and gloom. Many of the endings produce another dreamlike effect, an almost profound sense that there was something more here, encouraging rereading. *Tall Tales with Short Cocks* is an entertaining read with a diverse spread of Bizarro tales perfect for the enthusiast and newcomers to the genre alike.



Dead Ringers

By Max Scratchmann

To begin with, there was no dead Marley, no slaughtered previous incumbents who's untimely massacre had made the house cheap and definitely no long derelict Indian burial ground on the site. In fact, there was nothing whatsoever out of the ordinary about Twix and Nigel's humble abode, it being just one of a terrace of five boring newly-built maisonettes in an equally boring gated community, and with not even the slightest link to the supernatural.

Of course, before we go any further, let's be clear about one thing. Nigel and Twix were *not* nice people. They were a banker and an estate agent respectively. Or, in other words, two ruthless, money-grasping back-stabbers who would happily bludgeon their grandmothers over the head with a claw hammer if they thought there was a new Zanussi in it for them. So, don't worry, they inadvertently deserved everything they got, even though they did nothing directly to incur it.

It had all started on a rainy Saturday afternoon, as these things often do. Nigel was lying on the new sofa – John Lewis, nineteen hundred pounds ninety-nine in a price match – eating popcorn from a bowl, his bare feet sticking uncomfortably to the polythene over-wrapper that they hadn't quite yet found the courage to remove, when the phone rang. That was it. Just one ordinary little ring-ring sound that changed their life completely. And it could have been *so* easily avoided. They weren't expecting a call, so Nigel knew that it had to be a wrong number or some fucking telemarketer – nobody ever phoned them for *pleasure* – and he should have just lifted his skinny butt off the seat and picked it up, but no, he just stayed glued to the chair and let Twix come and answer it, idly watching her come striding out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron as she did so. And that was the moment when the planets lined up in a billion to one coincidence and two halves of some long separated female essence connected over the wires like virus cells mutating on a microscope slide.

"Hello, three-six-four-nine," she sing-songed shortly, looking daggers at him-indoors who was still lying doggo on the couch, stuffing his flaccid pink face with Butterkist. "Hello? Hello? Is there anybody there? Oh, I haven't

got time for this...”

“Who was it? Wrong number?” the boy asked disinterestedly, mouth full of extruded maize, eyes still on the flat-screen soccer game.

“I have no idea, it was mainly just static with some weird music in the background. Opera, I think, some woman singing in a high voice, anyway. Pity you missed it, eh?” she replied waspishly, heading back to the kitchen where she belonged, proving, if proof were ever needed, that five decades of feminism had changed practically nothing in the lives of lower-middle-class English women on a rainy Saturday afternoon. Though she suddenly felt a coldness in her heart that went well beyond her normal vexation with her spouse’s indolence.

But, aside from that, nothing else happened to disrupt the boredom of their Saturday routine, except that Twix ate rather a lot of meat at dinner time, having given up on being vegetarian some weeks before, despite what Glamour Magazine said about the links between beef and cellulite, and, after watching some turgid melodrama on Sky One, the two of them went wearily to bed.

Now, they weren’t a cold couple, if you catch my drift, but they did tend to keep their, how shall I put this, *coupling* somewhat regulated, and they’d already used up this week’s quota the previous night, so Nigel was rather surprised to feel his spouse wriggling down his body as soon as the light went out, and even more surprised to feel her fingers in the fly of his pyjama bottom’s and her lips greedily suckling at what they’d found down there.

“Immm, baby,” he purred, “that’s some loving your giving your daddy, baby girl.”

Twix answered back with some matching endearment, though, as she had her mouth well and truly full at the time it’s impossible to record exactly what it was that was said, though she usually hated it when Nigel black-talked, as she put it, but tonight she couldn’t seem to get enough of him and seemed determined to do a Linda Lovelace on him right there and then.

“Oh, yes, baby...” Nigel started to moan, when his contented-cat purring turned into a howl of agony as Twix bit clean through his penis and proceeded to eat it, oblivious the bleeding and howling form of her boyfriend writhing on the bed beside her.

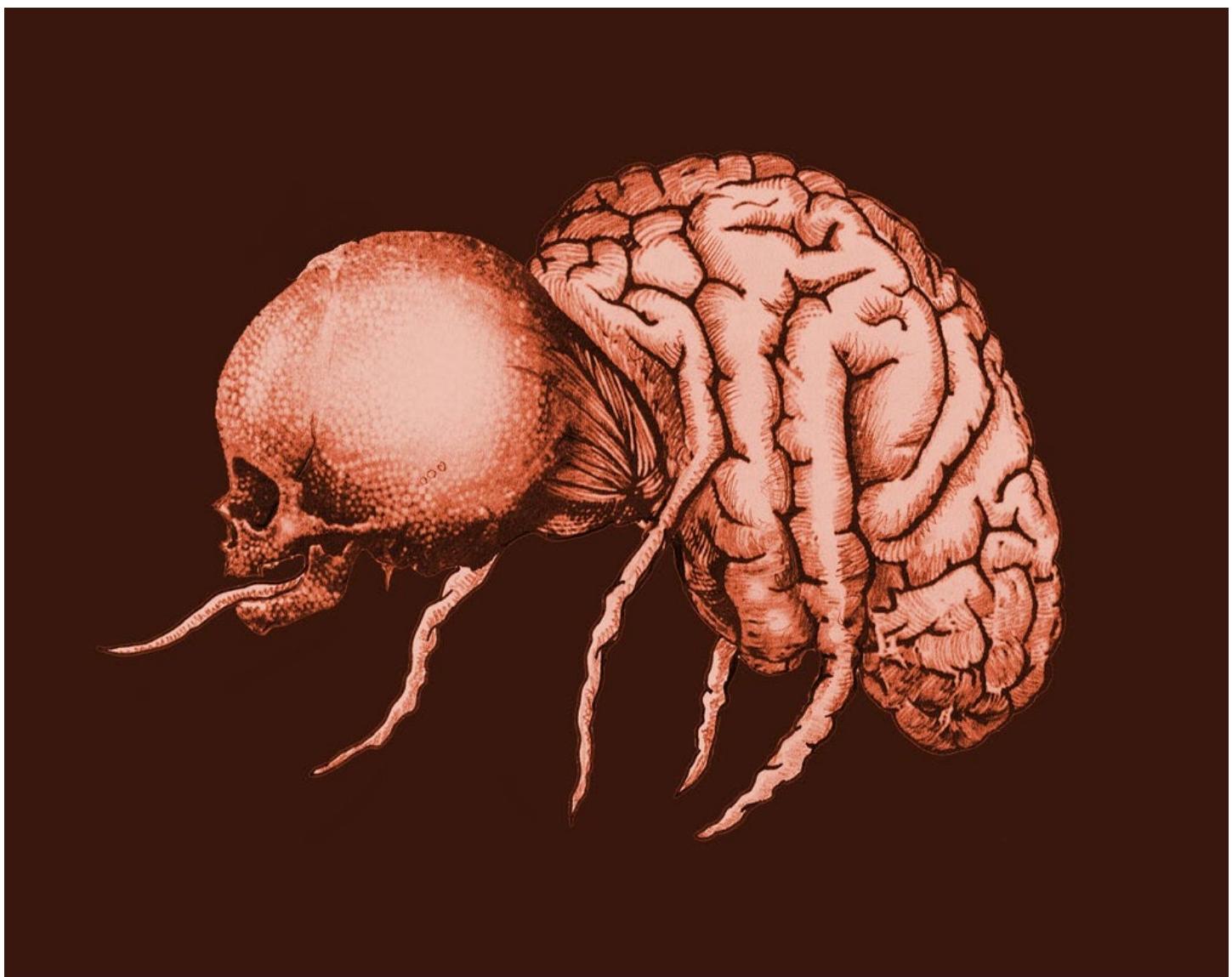
They think that he was quite weak from loss of blood but still alive when she went back to the buffet table for second helpings, and, the forensics people later reckoned that it took her about two days to eat her way through his entire body and then go out into the street looking for fresh meat.

She got the next door neighbour first, a small nervous woman who everyone suspected of lesbian leanings, and polished her off in less than twenty four hours, before moving down the block and getting the fat geek in number three as he was taking a bag of dirty washing round to his mother's house; and she would have got the mother too, except the old lady had sprained an ankle and didn't come round to clean her blue-eyed boy's house on Wednesday as normal.

In fact, who knows exactly how long her midnight feast would have gone on for if a passing paperboy hadn't seen the geek's severed leg in the porch and phoned the Old Bill – after making sure he'd loaded the footage up to You Tube, of course – and then after that everything was history, as the saying goes.

Twix was pronounced unfit to plead, of course, and she even tried to eat the court bailiffs when they brought her into the dock, and so they keep her in a very small cell and feed her raw meat, and, rumour has it, stray dogs destined to be destroyed by the animal welfare organisations. But what only you and I know is, that whatever thing it was that phoned her is still out there, its scaly fingers rippling through the banks and banks of circuits at the telephone exchange, looking for another number to make a connection with.

Who knows, maybe even yours?



DOCTOR TRAGEDY

JEREMY MADDUX

Modern day psychiatry is riddled with communicative approaches where the patient takes verbal inventory of their innermost thoughts. The problem is that these exercises serve only to engage the cerebral cortex. Going back to the root beginnings of the psychiatric field, there was much debate as to which areas of the brain should be treated for grief.

Enter Primal Scream Therapy, falsely credited to Arthur Janov when, in fact, it was conceived by Janov's mentor, Clavius Steadman. Steadman paved the way for an entirely new method of dealing with physical and emotional trauma, which tapped into the basest outpourings of grief without patients having to internalize or intellectualize their feelings. Clavius arrived at the conclusion that auditory expressions of remorse, particularly crying and screaming, but also moaning, bellowing and hysterical laughter all had a physical energy signature the same way contrails from a jet would. He also believed that by providing an isolated environment for his patients to expel these psychodramas, it would neutralize the triggers in their everyday lives, whether they be sights, sounds, smells or situations.

This approach was ridiculed for being impractical. His response was that pain was impractical. He said his method worked, and it did. Many troubled individuals passed through his care who went on to live productive, healthy lives. When the decibel level got too high at the treatment center, neighboring facilities in the medical complex registered formal complaints. Clavius had no choice but to move the practice to his home, where he soundproofed the basement.

Now, he could chart their progress undisturbed, but there were evenings when Clavius' daughter, Rebecca Steadman, could hear the sessions downstairs, suggesting it wasn't so soundproof after all. What she heard in that basement would keep her up for several nights, long after the sessions concluded.

Clavius didn't just make his patients remember their trauma. He wanted them to relive it, as if they were back in the moment with a chance to change things. He would recompose scenes from their most traumatic moments and attempt to replicate them as accurately as possible. He would use post-hypnotic suggestion to persuade the patients that they could subdue their aggressors with the screams they made. Sometimes, he would even allow them to strike him if he felt the situation warranted such extremes.

When his daughter had a nervous breakdown, he insisted on being the one to treat her. The Medical Board was opposed to this, but allowed his colleague, Arthur Janov, to administer PST after all conventional methods were exhausted. What became clear was that the source of Rebecca Steadman's breakdown was, in fact, the result of her father's practice itself. Thus, if they were to treat her with primal screaming, her father would need to be present.

What resulted from these sessions was impossible to fully comprehend, mainly because they determined the source of Rebecca's troubles to be the screams from all the patients over the years. To explore Rebecca's trauma was to revisit every one of her father's cases. To ask her to relive so many shrieks and wails was to invite much worse than a mere breakdown, but a clean psychotic break. Nevertheless, Janov pressed on at his mentor's insistence. Clavius was ready and willing to sacrifice his daughter on the altar of his profession.

"There was a sense that she *could* get better" Janov later stated to the papers, "But not as long as her father was in the picture. He was much too concerned with his legacy to help his daughter. What he did to that child was incorrigible, really incorrigible! I believe he raised hell on earth when he got his hooks in that poor girl. I say this as a man of science!"

The sessions would drag on for hours several nights a week. The work consumed both Clavius and Janov, the latter of which was beginning to show signs of chronic fatigue. Rebecca stopped talking altogether, and would only respond with screams. Authorities removed the girl from her father and placed her with a well meaning Baptist couple who saw her blossom into a young woman.

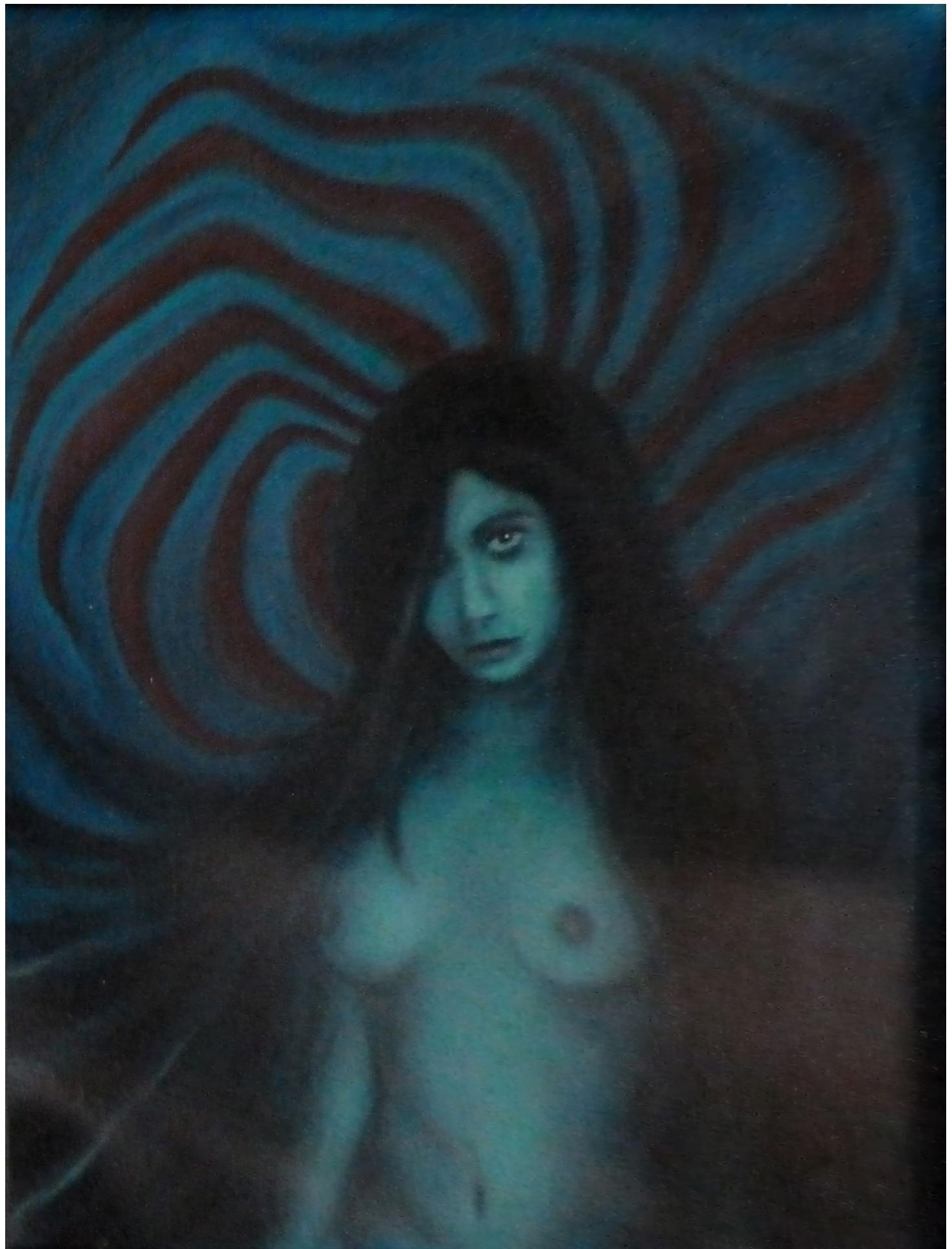
Rebecca learned to speak again in the care of the Greenlee Family. For a short while, it seemed her life would return to normal, until she started having night terrors. Her screams would shatter vases and knock over bookshelves. One night, Mrs. Greenlee suffered a heart attack, believed to be induced by Rebecca.

Mr. Greenlee withdrew from Rebecca and wouldn't say more than a few words to her. In truth, he treated Rebecca with a cool contempt. It was clear that Mr. Greenlee had to go. So I screamed his head off, just like I screamed his stupid wife's heart out.

Figuring I was on a roll, I tracked down daddy. He was so glad to see me again. I was proof that his therapy worked. It was the authorities he couldn't convince. We embraced for the last time. He had put me through hours of agony, but he was still my father, so I sang him to sleep. He'd earned a peaceful death. I saved my worst for Janov, that mewling little assistant who altered the therapeutic process and now basked in the glory of daddy's discovery, and even profited from it.

Janov screamed for hours. I tried screaming with him to let him know he wasn't alone. He died from an aneurysm. Evidently, the man was too soft for his own work. The screams in that basement had a tangible presence. Daddy was right. Human vocalizations do have a life of their own. In fact, they're almost like organisms themselves. The more you feed them, the bigger they get. I left my own signature in the blood of daddy and Janov. *Doctor* with Janov's and *Tragedy* with daddy's.

Doctor Tragedy. That's me. Though authorities may look for me, they will never find me. I inhabit a far greater plane. Anytime you lose your temper in the middle of a grueling work day, you will find me. Anytime you wail at the news of a departed loved one, that is me. Anywhere you cry out for someone to listen or understand you because you feel invisible, I am with you. If you haven't any of these experiences to your credit, don't worry, you will. I look forward to making your acquaintance.







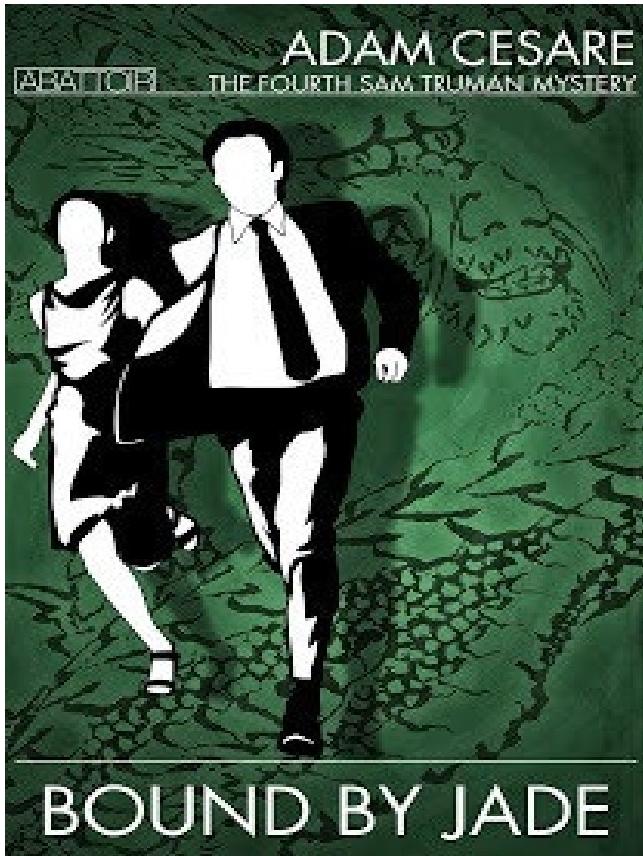


<http://damienworm.deviantart.com/>

BOUND BY JADE:

The Fourth Sam Truman Mystery by Adam Cesare

A Review by Courtney Alsop



Sam Truman, unlicensed P.I., wakes up in a pay-by-the-hour brothel, bound with jade handcuffs to a beautiful Asian woman, Luhk Sih. Unfortunately for him, this is not a good thing. She has hired him to escort her, and her cuffs, to safety. It does not seem to be that difficult-Sam even skips going to the bathroom-until the Triads find them and want their property back. The term "property" becomes complicated, as Luhk is more involved as she lets on.

Sam is a disgraced P.I. who is now disgruntled and sarcastic, and a pleasure to read. While he cannot accept typical cases anymore, he now focuses on the *paranormal* cases. In this case, the jade cuffs are more than an ancient artifact. Without giving spoilers, the cuffs hold some special magic inside that is profitable to those who have it. However, as Lau explains, it has been stolen to America and "we charge the worst of

the worst for the privilege of sticking their dicks in it." This story is not a horror as we would see it, but it definitely falls into the hardboiled paranormal detective story. The story does not shy away from the blood and gore that happens when you shoot someone, and the places they go are overall grimy and disgusting. The words used to describe the atmosphere can be absolutely stomach churning at times.

This is the fourth installment in the series, and a new title is released on the Kindle every six weeks. This method of releasing a story every six weeks will certainly have fans returning. I have not read the previous stories, and I feel I did not get much of his background, which is a shame for new readers, though I am now intrigued and I would like to read the previous stories. I did get the feeling that he is no longer in his former glory, but exactly why, I am not sure. If gritty paranormal detective stories interest you, I recommend *Bound By Jade*.

Lamia Key





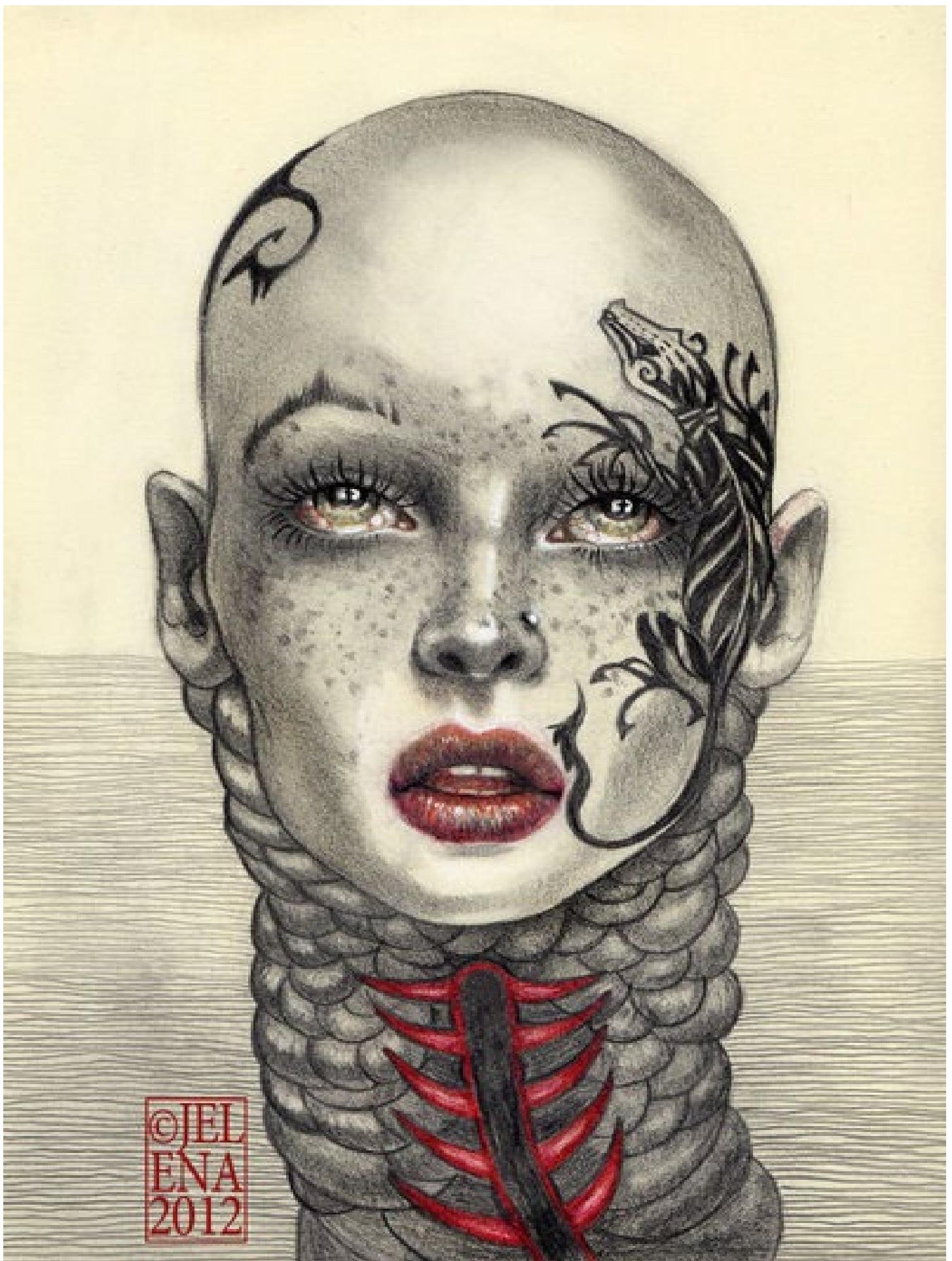


Sometimes
I prowl like
a cat along
deserted
winding
streets
and sun-
dappled
rooftops
of mysterious
dream cities
you can
see the heat
patterns
wavering
in the air.
The stark
whites
and crisp,
dazzling
blues.

All this to see, and no one
around to see it—no one but
me. When I grow weary of
exploring such places, I fly
elsewhere on huge gray wings.



WU 2010



OIEL
ENA
2012

On My Way to Yucca Mountain!

By Joshua Ryan

The sun was over the horizon as the red 1958 Buick roared over a high hill. The car caught some air and slammed harshly back down onto the pavement. The wild jester of a man driving howled in excited laughter. The exhaust shot out a loud bang and the car continued speeding along. It passed a Route 95 sign on the right; a rattlesnake was curled around its bottom. The snake snapped at the car as it flashed by. The man in the car is soon to be known as the most notorious terrorist in the history of the United States, but in his mind it was for the greater good.

The man behind the wheel wore a bowl hat, an awful Hawaiian shirt, and a pair of dirty shorts that cut above the knee. He wondered to himself: *How am I driving so straight for being so drunk?* The man closed his eyes for about a minute. When he opened them he was still on the straightway highway in the desert. He reasoned to himself: *Must have been all that Miami white I did off that stripper's ass.* The man smiled and howled into the desert air like a wolf under the moon.

The man turned on the radio and switched through the channels. He turned to the thing in the passenger seat and asked, "What do you like to listen to?" The thing next to him did not reply, probably because it was an Atom Bomb. The Atom Bomb looked as if it was taken out from under the Enola Gay. It was of cartoonish form and had a target painted on its nose. It was strapped into its seatbelt, because safety always comes first. The man found some old rock n' roll channel and danced to the tunes.

A yellow school bus pulled onto Route 95 from 160. The red Buick crossed in front of it. The school bus was filled with nuns. The man in the Buick flipped them off and threw a bottle at the windshield. The man screamed at the chaste women, "GOD don't live here no' more." The bus turned the opposite way and the Buick continued on.

With the Yellow school bus full of nuns disappearing in his rear view, the man lit up a cigarette. By the time the

damn thing was down to the filter, he had already entered Armargosa Valley, Nevada.

The man took a swig of his whiskey, kissed his index and middle finger together, and laid both of them on the Atom Bomb. He began to speak out loud:

"To the American who is full of pride, haven't you heard of that book? That famous fuckin' book. What was called now? The Bible, was that it? Yeah, that was it. It says pride is a sin, but you motherfucker's celebrate it. I am proud to be an American. I am proud to be a land robbing, nigger-hating, gay bashing, war ragin', cheeseburger eating, plastic tit jiggling, small dick perverting, Internet surfing, drug addict, and an American dreaming dirty old son of a bitch. And when I say this, it is with a heavy heart, because I don't believe a single word of it. God Bless nothing."

Yucca Mountain in the Southwest region of Nevada had been the United States Nuclear Waste Depository for the past 30 years. The plan was initially scrapped in 2010, but in 2015 they opened Yucca Mountain for business.

The mountain was a beautiful sight in mid morning. A silence had taken over the desert as the red Buick passed. A blinding white light illuminated the landscape. A low boom sound was heard for hundreds of miles. The man in the red Buick had set off his passenger.

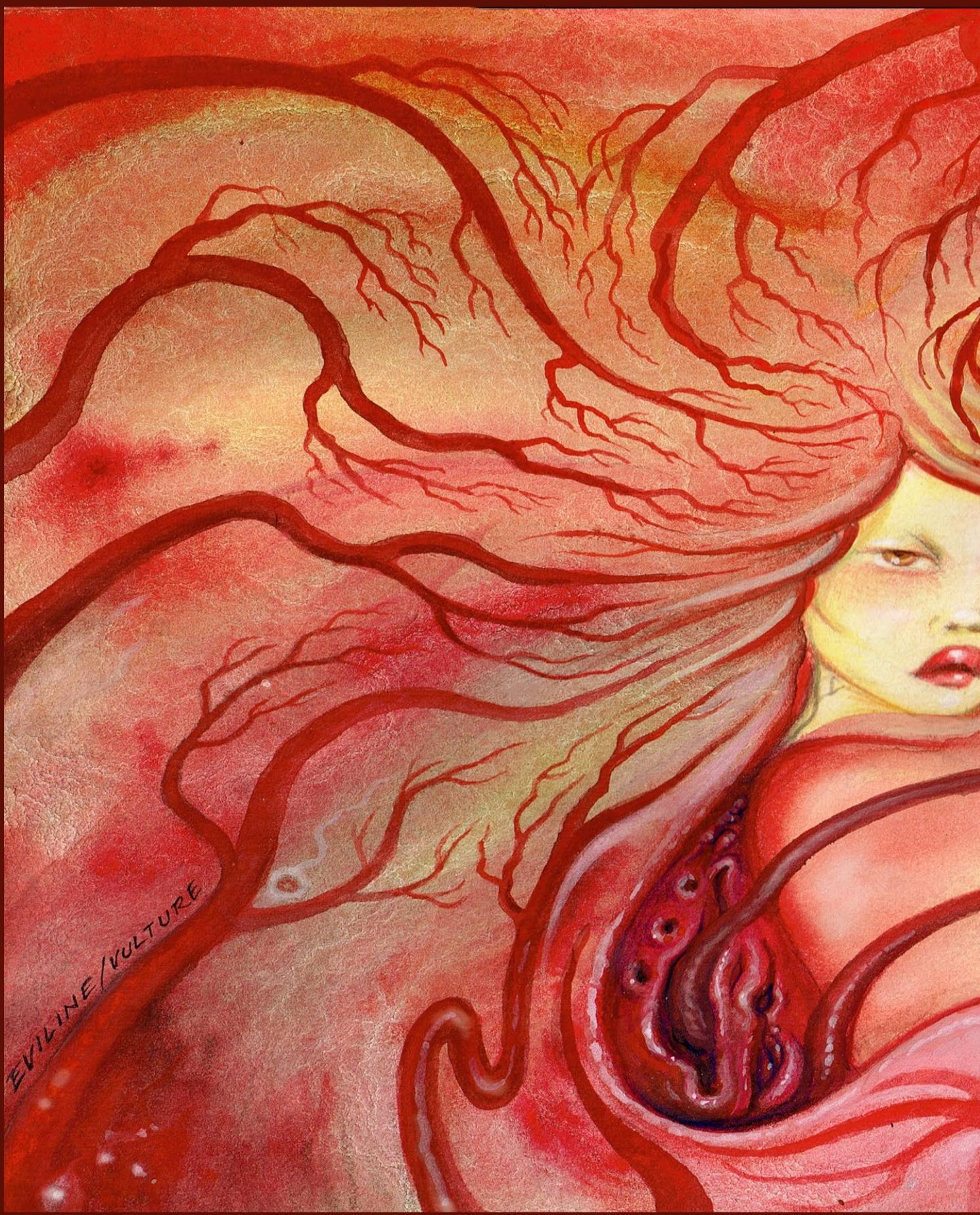
The bomb blast reached about a ten-mile radius. The shockwaves were detrimental to the mountain and its depository. Nuclear Waste had mixed with the smoke and entered the upper atmosphere, where it traveled the world and took out huge populations, just by being weather.

Yucca Mountain was built over fault lines that caused earthquakes, the area was also known for its volcanic activity. Volcanoes up and down the pacific coast were spewing lava onto city streets. Buildings were crumbling to their foundations and people were dying all around the world.

All of this pain was caused by an American who had nothing to lose and had to prove that to everyone.

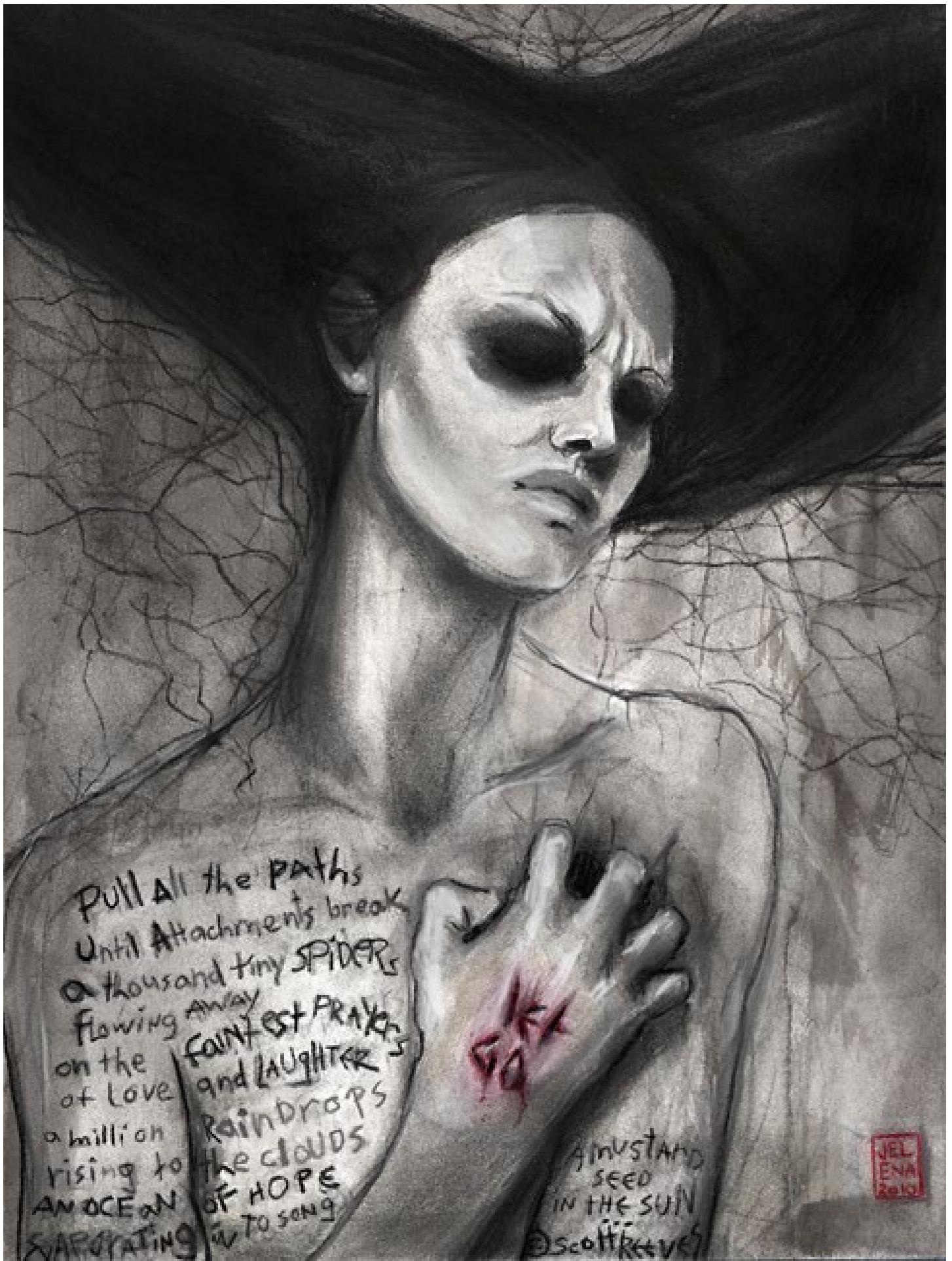
The world had ended.





EVILINE/VULTURE





PULL ALL THE PATHS
Until Attachments break
A thousand tiny SPIDERS
flowing away
on the faintest PRAYER
of Love and LAUGHTER
a million Raindrops
rising to the clouds
AN OCEAN OF HOPE
EVAPORATING INTO SONG

I must stand
SEED
IN THE SUN
@scottkewi

VEL
EVIA
2010

PERFECTION

KELA LEWIS MORIN

She lodges her fingers down her throat.

Clasping onto the wall as she recklessly chokes.

She reinserts her fingers back in forcibly.

Deliriously trying to make her body thinner.

She swoons and slumps to the floor nauseously

As she attempts to regurgitate her dinner.

Her throat aches as she screeches out coarsely,

With her hand covering the image in the mirror.

Her head now rests on the rim of the toilet seat.

She wants to eat but she just has not got in her.

She desperately begins to scream out inaudibly.

Her mouth now tastes of something pulpy and bitter.

She examines the red color of the fluid cautiously.

Realizing that she has become too focused on her figure.

Her friend then knocks on the door thoughtfully.

She shouts out, "I'm okay I don't need a baby sitter."

Her friend continues to knock and waits outside awkwardly

Replies, "You promised me, you said that you are not a quitter"

The tap begins to run as she disguises her cough distortedly.

She knows her friend is right but she refuses to consider

Her opinion as attainable because she sees herself as morbidly

Overweight and that she must become thinner and fitter.

The media have forced her to become paranoid.

Surrounded by all of these perfectly sculptured people.

These portraits have become impossible to avoid

Which is why she can never see herself as an equal.

Kela Lewis-Morin



<http://damienworm.deviantart.com/>

THE HOSPITAL FOR DYING GODS

DANIEL WILLIAM GONZALES

“So you’re new, huh?” the nurse said, through the mouth in the center of her forehead as her eyes glared at him from where her nipples used to be.

“Yeah, I just got promoted. Did a hundred years in Hell, got sent over to Purgatory for good behavior then they said I could work here in Limbo on a part-time basis,” the overeager teen said. He still had his baby horns from so many years living in Hell but had tried to chisel them down so she wouldn’t notice. She almost found it cute, if he still didn’t have that goofy human face.

“Well, this place is unlike any home you have probably worked at.”

“I figured.”

“Now, if you are here looking for those Lovecraftian Old Ones like Cthulhu, you are going to be disappointed, they don’t exist. They were the inventions of a man with cross-dressing problems,” she said, firmly, tucking her pen into her anus.

“No, no, I know. I’m not one of those guys, trust me. I met plenty of those dudes in the torture wards in hell, all they talked about was Cthulhu this, Old Ones that. They really thought they were real and were going to help them rise up out of Hell and take over the earth. I knew it was all horseshit. In fact, I’m curious to see what Gods were real, I didn’t believe in an afterlife until I died. Then I kind of had to.”

The nurse laughed at this, “Neither did I but I was born thousands of years before most religions when the universe was still young, so we got to choose where we wanted to spend eternity. It wasn’t all red tape and damnations like it is now. The afterlife was a really cool place to be.”

Human 52CX looked at the wistful look in the nurse’s nipple-eyes and felt her sadness. He couldn’t imagine existing that long here before going into the great slumber. That was what he longed to earn more than anything, either the rebirthing or the slumber. The worst was endless consciousness, it was cool if you were in Heaven and high on angel-crack all the time but living in Hell, one was never allowed to sleep. He had died of starvation and sleep deprivation so many times, he couldn’t remember but then would be brought back to life to do it all over again. In Hell, everyone was always starving but anything they put in their mouth turned to ash. You were always tired but could never sleep. Hell was endless awareness of one’s existence and bodily functions.

52CX followed the nurse down the fleshy halls which were a pink hue and when he touched them he could feel the slime-like substance on the walls.

“What is that?” he asked her.

“Psychic residue,” she said, walking on her black twisted fuzzy spider legs down the corridor.

Her upper half was something resembling human but jumbled while her bottom half was all arachnid.

“Psychic residue from the patients?” he asked.

“Yeah, or ‘god farts’ as we call them. When the Gods fart, the walls sweat slime.”

52CX pondered this for a moment.

He also tried to look at the chart the nurse was carrying, he knew she had his working papers and he had been trying to get a glimpse of them for the last century. Since residing in Hell, his entire life on Earth had been erased from his mind, all he remembered was endless suffering and misery. He couldn't even remember his human name, only that he was 52CX and he longed to know what his real name was and who he had been when he was alive. She had all that info in her manila folder but it was against the deities to show it to him. She could be prosecuted by the hierarchy of angels. The angels were always having trials and flying to court on their gold-tinted wings.

His defending angel, Seraphina had been a sexy winger who had gotten him into Purg and now the Limb. Everybody wanted into the Limb because the Limb was only one step away from being an angel's foot-licker in Heaven. Better to be a foot-licker in Heaven than an ass-licker of a demon in Hell. At least that's what the saying went.

"Do you think I—"

"I know what you are going to ask and please don't put me in an awkward position," the spider-nurse said, the name badge stuck through her skin read: BELLADONNA.

"Please, Bella—I just want to know my name. I have waited so long. I mean I have no memories of my human life, isn't that punishment enough? I don't even know what I did wrong to end up in Hell. They took everything from me. Can't I even just know my name?"

Belladonna looked at him thoughtfully for a moment, he stared at her eye nips with a pitiful look on his face.

"I'll tell you what, newbie," she said, "If you do a good job tonight, maybe I will tell you what your name is. You know how much trouble I could get in. But since we are probably going to be working together for the next thousand years, I might as well be somewhat nice to you. It's hard to be a bitch for all eternity, I tried it but after the first thousand years, it gets really tiring."

Human 52CX smiled, "Thank you! Thank you! That is all I ask! Just let me prove myself."

"Fine, here is your first test. You go help Room 1100 BC."

"BC?"

"Yeah, even here they organize things by that weirdo. As if he is so goddamn special, son of God, my ass. Schizophrenic more like it," she said, tapping her spider-leg on the tile floors which made small squeaking noises. He wonder if they were alive too.

The boy walked into the room with the tray of food, the nurse pushed to him and pulled back the curtain. Inside, a jackal-headed creature laid in the bed.

"Hello, mister..." he searched for the chart.

"ANUBIS! You dumb fuck! Don't you recognize me! I used to be a famous Egyptian God! You kids have no respect today. All your Gods are pop stars and rappers! TV and the internet is your religion! I was the weigher of souls, the God of Death! Who were you? Some peasant, I'm sure."

"I just started here, sir. I'm not sure who I am. I have no memory of my human life," the boy, smiled shyly, "I just got done with a hundred years in Hell not too long ago, they say if you can survive Hell then you can survive anything."

"Hell?" the jackal God shrieked at him, "What do you know of Hell, boy? Hell was a lot tougher in my day! They boiled people alive back then over and over, whores were stung by bees from inside their filthy wombs, men were fed shit and got razorblades stuck up their assholes! What do you do now? Work in labor camps and starve to death? Pussy hell! That is what I call it! Hell is for pussies now. Lucifer has turned into a big pussy with age."

"I only saw him once from afar. He looked like a nice little old man, kind of like somebody's grandpa."

"Exactly!" Anubis bellowed, "He used to actually try to be scary. Now he just turns into a little old man, I heard he doesn't even torture people anymore, he has all his demons do it for him. Lazy cunt!"

"Well, according to your chart, Mr. Anubis, you are having chest pains lately? Coughing up blood?"

"It doesn't mean anything. I'm just old."

"The council of seraphim say that you may be headed towards complete dissolution."

"What the fuck do they know? Winged faggots is what they are. All blowing each other up there. Angels are the biggest queers in the afterlife!"

"Have parts of your limbs been disappearing and reappearing lately?" the boy asked.

"None of your business."

"Please Mr. Anubis, I'm trying to help you here."

"My name isn't Mr. Anubis, peasant! Read the chart. My name is Anpu Inepu Katet. Anubis is a nickname. It's not Mr., it's just Anubis."

"Okay, Anubis," the red-headed boy said now, frazzled and felt that familiar ache in his stomach. He ignored it but then he realized that here in Limbo, he was actually allowed to eat. He wouldn't have to keep starving to death.

"Now help me up," Anubis said, "I have to go to the bathroom."

"You have bodily functions?" the boy said, astonished.

"Yeah, so what? That doesn't mean anything. Help me!"

The boy went over to the side of the bed and let the jackal lean up on him. He could smell his fiery breath and felt his long tongue dangle in front of him.

They went into the restroom where he helped the jackal put out his oversized cock and urinate into the toilet. His bulging pulsating member throbbed and poured out a strange thick black liquid.

"Has that been happening often?" the boy said.

"Once in awhile," Anubis said, weakly and fell back against the wall.

The boy carried him to the bed.

He had all the signs of dissolution. Once a God grew near death, they started to become human in every way, eventually growing a heart and then having it die.

He looked into the jackal faced creature and saw an almost human face then. The face of an old man.

"What's wrong?" Anubis asked.



"Nothing, I just thought I saw something for a minute."

"You know I wasn't always this bad. I had a wife, her name was Anput and we had a daughter, Kabechet. People really believed in the Gods back then, they didn't have TV or reality shows, we were their entertainment. They told stories about us and willed us into existence. We were able to come to the physical plane eventually and I was appointed the judge of the damned. My father was Ra but later my mother told me she also slept with the serpent God Seth so I could have been his son too, I never really knew. I used to be the gatekeeper to the underworld. Hell was mine but then Christianity came and ruined everything. Lucifer was willed into being and suddenly hell was his and I was considered obsolete. Osiris is what you humans believed to be the Good God and Ammit was the devil-man. Then Lucifer took over and Osiris fell from Heaven, Ammit dissolved from existence and I was banished by a three headed dog! A dog took my place!"

The boy sat on the edge of the bed and listen to the jackal-man as his face began to dissolve and took what was now a human hand.

"You know the lake of fire? That was my idea! Not his!"

"It is a rather beautiful lake," the boy smiled.

"Just promise me something," Anubis said then.

"Sure," the boy said, "Anything."

"Don't let them forget about me. Make sure I stay in the history books. Don't let them destroy the memory of me."

"I promise," the boy said, somberly.

Anubis took something from the side of the bed and put it in the boy's hand.

"I want you to have this."

"What is it?"

"A piece of my soul but it's yours now to keep."

"I don't know if I can—"

"Please."

"O-Okay," the boy said and opened up his palms and glared at the glowing fragment shaped like an ankh.

“Also tell Belladonna something for me.”

“Sure.”

“That bitch has got great legs.”

Anubis dissolved then and a great wind blew ashes all over the room. The boy washed his face and put the soul fragment in his pocket.

As he emerged from the room, the nurse stopped him.

“Did you make him comfortable?” she asked.

“Yes, he passed peacefully.”

“Wonderful,” she said, “We try to give our patients here, a decent passing.”

“So?”

“So what?”

“You made me a promise.”

“Oh, that.”

“Please, Bella—my name.”

She sighed, “If it really means that much to you. Your name is Malcolm.”

The boy smiled.

Malcolm. He liked that.

My name is Malcolm, he thought and smiled.

Just then the doors to the building burst open, the angels rushed the man inside.

Patients started to come out of their rooms. Zeus stood at his door, then Shiva came to stare, Poseidon rose from his bed as Aphrodite began to complain of all the noise.

“Please, we need a doctor,” the angels said in unison, “He has started to dissolve.”

“Dr. Infinity is in surgery trying to save Vishnu and all his ten manifestations,” Belladonna said.

“This is imperative!” the angel’s eyes flashed and he pulled out his flaming sword.

“Who is the patient?” Malcolm heard Allah ask from behind him, turning away from the TV.

The angel moved back and presented them with Christ.

All the Gods down the hall began to gasp and talk in excited voices.

“Maybe if he dies, they will bring me back...” Malcolm heard someone mumble.

“Fuck that,” Apollo said, “They are all atheists and assholes down there now.”



Malcolm watched as a strange flowing light appeared above Jesus's head.

"What is that?" he asked Belladonna.

"The Holy Spirit. Big show-off if you ask me."

"Paging Dr. Infinity! Dr. Infinity to the lobby!"

"I don't understand," Malcolm said, "Why can't he just heal himself? Isn't he God?"

Belladonna laughed, "You are still so young. Don't you understand by now? There is more than one God and all the good Gods are dying."



AMERICANPIECE1/OFFERMOORD 2012

Snow Baby

Joseph J. Patchen

They are still dead. Even a six year old knows that. In all, since morning, Johnny has prayed over them for two hours and 39 minutes, but they still will not move, not even a twitch. Their color is now changing and their skin is becoming sticky as their bodies grow puffy. They do not look much like his parents anymore.

He wanted to move them, but they are too heavy and he is too small to put them on the bed or sofa. In places, such as their fingers and arms, they seem to be hardening, so if he were to pull on them, he is also afraid of breaking them.

He tried blowing air into them. First with his mouth, then with his basketball pump, but nothing - no cough or spit, - only some blood and a curious looking green grey ooze came out of the holes where their ears and noses are.

They have now become ice cold and splotchy and are beginning to emit a foul odor. He has, more than a couple of times, sprayed them with air freshener and a clear bathroom cleaner he found under a sink, but still remains puzzled as to why they are lying in a pool of, amongst other things, 'potty'.

But more importantly, it is past lunch time and Johnny is getting hungry.

It has been snowing since yesterday morning. It is snowing harder now, than during the last night when the young couple finally succumbed. According to the television, this is a good old fashioned blizzard: a classic textbook Nor'easter. The storm has already cut the once small, but busy town, into pieces.

'How does that happen?' Johnny wonders. 'Snow is so soft and fluffy. I can rub it in my hands. I can roll around in it. Outside I see snow piling high and blowing about in the easiest of breezes. How can it cut something hard like a road or a brick building?' He just does not know what to make of the situation and that is why he is leaving the television on for more news and possibly some advice.

He tried using the phone, but it is as silent as his mother.

"When I was 'little-er' I used to love the snow." He occasionally talks out loud to himself . "I made snowmen and forts and I threw snowballs. My mommy and daddy liked the snow too, or at least they looked happy when the other kids in the neighborhood came over and played. We'd make snow angels, play army and then we'd have hot cocoa and cookies and watch cartoons.

There is no one around to play with today; I don't like the snow today."

He plays with some of his army men, on the floor some fifteen feet from his father and another ten from his mother. All the curtains and shades are drawn as they have been since the snow began. What little light of day there is slithers in on the edges. The only true light in the room is a flickering television whose alternating images of light and dark, color and grey, at times, strobe through the darkened room. "I love the smell of soup when it snows. The cocoa too.

But the smell of chicken soup is so salty, it just reminds me of snow. I wish we had cocoa or soup."

A barely audible, dry scratchy voice from a point in the room opposite the boy answers, "You know they use salt to melt snow?"

"They do?" The boy is astonished, showing emotion and peeked curiosity for the first time this entire weekend. "But if the snow melts..."

The voice, almost paternally, nudges in, "I know. It all ends."

Johnny makes his way to the picture window and moves within the curtains to slide between the window and its thick, broad shade. Outside, he sees white upon white; he cannot discern a thing, not even the big oak tree in his own front yard.

"Where are the other kids?" Johnny asks without looking back.

"They're around." The voice is now dispersed throughout the room, floor to ceiling, over, under and through the furniture; it cannot be pinpointed to any specific area of the room. "You'll meet your friends at the orange colored tree when it stops snowing."

The boy seems a bit startled, "Before the sun comes out?"

"Definitely."

"Oh good. The sun is bad for you. You can catch cancer from the sun according to my mother. You know that's why we have the windows covered so much."

"That is why we came here, because of the sun."

Johnny hypnotically watches the snow fall. A couple of minutes pass without notice, then the young man begins to fidget and in staccato fashion blurts out questions. "What is going to happen to Mommy and Daddy? Is someone coming to clean the house? Can I get a pizza? What if I just want to stay here?"

There is no response.

The milk from the fridge is still cool. Cereal and cartoons seem to calm the young man down. Truly, the smell is getting worse and the bodies are thickening, but the snow is thinning.

When Johnny wakes up in his father's recliner, he is covered in cereal and milk, and it is daylight. A thin, shimmering light is puncturing the clouds and bleeding into the room where the boy has slept. Rubbing his eyes and stretching his legs, he rolls out the chair and makes his way to the myriad of window covers that barricade the great pane and he peeks out.

Mountains of snow are covering everything he knows, and those great hills themselves are covered by a shiny mirror of ice. There is no one or thing moving. No visible footprints or tracks.

Nothing has been plowed and the clouds still hang low, dense and grey, as if to promise more.

In the distance, about a block straight ahead, where the next cul de sac is supposed to be, the fences and the houses appear to be gone. The crust covered snow is clean, sleek and untouched between Johnny's home and a large, scraggly overgrown tree. Some of the branches appear to be weighted down, but Johnny's eyes are not adjusting quickly enough to the bright light for him to make out by what.

For the first time, the television is drowned out by other sounds. These are not snow blowers or plows. These are not the shouts of glee from sledding children or shovels on pavement. For the first time, Johnny hears scratching and gnashing against the back door. He will later learn that this comes from a pack of vermin that, too, can smell the death and are hungry.

Johnny whips around toward the sound, focusing on the back door where the kitchen is, but his feet are frozen. He is not sure who or what it is, but he is afraid to move towards it. He can see tiny shadows flitting back and forth under the door that now starts to rattle and heave a bit as the rodents mass. He is beginning to figure it out and his fidgeting is now almost manic.

“Ready to go?” A scratchy, rasping whisper breaks through. The voice seems to come from above, somewhere on the ceiling and in the shadows created by the light and shades. The young boy cannot determine where it is coming from. “It is time. Ready to go.”

“What if I don’t want to go?” Johnny is moving his feet, moving his body in a circle in one place. He is turning his head from side to side and around and around. “That wasn’t the deal Johnny.” The back door seems to bend inward slightly on its lower half. The closer to the floor, the more pronounced the bend. The young man is transfixed as the wood begins to give way.

“Ready to go Johnny?” The voice is stronger. So is the scratching and rattling of the door. The rats themselves are getting louder; they almost seem to growl.

Johnny is crying and sweating, filled with fear and regret. He closes his eyes and wraps his arms around his head as if to protect his eyes.

In an instant, all is quiet and Johnny is outside. Despite being out in the snow, the air is springtime cool, not winter cold. Johnny’s eyes and body are awash in a bright, orange pulsating light. In the distance he can see his house, the only house in the neighborhood not swallowed by snow. The young man finds himself in a long line with other children of his age or younger. They are silently moving forward, one at time, trudging towards the orange tree.

He does not recognize anyone from his school or neighborhood. He does not see any of his friends or cousins. Johnny tries to talk with someone, but the children keep their heads down, staring at their feet and shuffling forward.

The line moves steadily forward. The orange light gets brighter and warmer. While Johnny is sweating, the snow is not melting. He finds he cannot hold his head anywhere but down. To look up or even forward hurts his eyes because the pulses of orange blind him. His strength is beginning to wane.

Before long, he realizes he has made it to the front of the line and is standing at the base of the pulsating orange tree. There, an emaciated man, with features of bone and empty holes for eyes and nose, firmly places his left palm on the young man’s shoulder, entwining his fingers into Johnny’s back. His is the same rasping, flint like voice from the house.

“Well son, you have made it. Congratulations.”

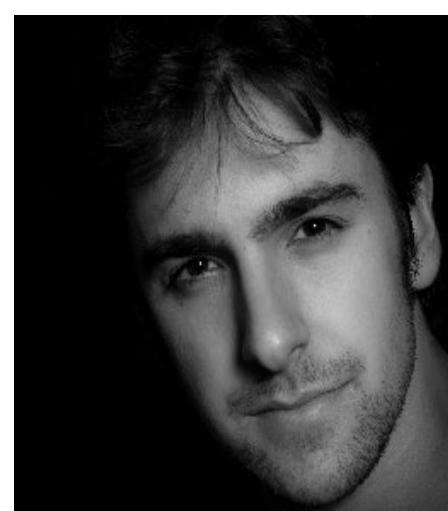
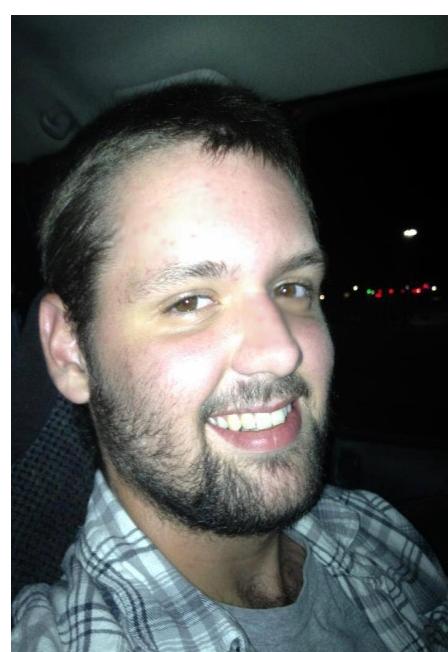
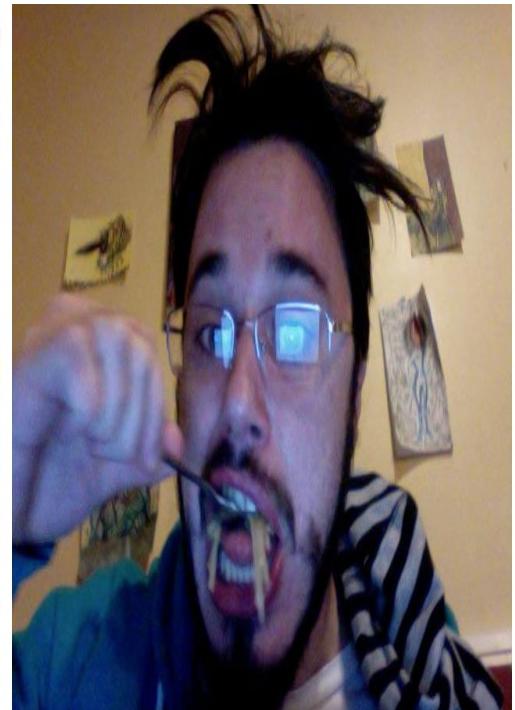
“What?” Johnny is growing drowsy. Deep down he realizes he is in danger, but he does not have the wherewithal to do anything about it.

The man then slowly places an old fashioned hangman’s noose over the young man’s head and around his neck. He asks Johnny if he wishes to wear a hood and if he has a preference as to the height of the limb.

“You’re going to hang me like an outlaw?” He tries to fight the noose off, but the rope begins to burn and brand his flesh.

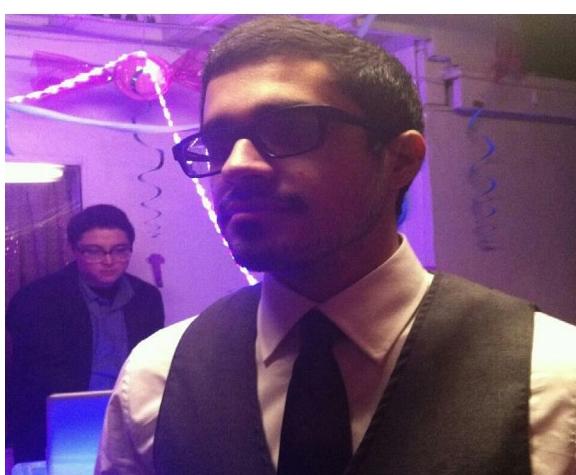
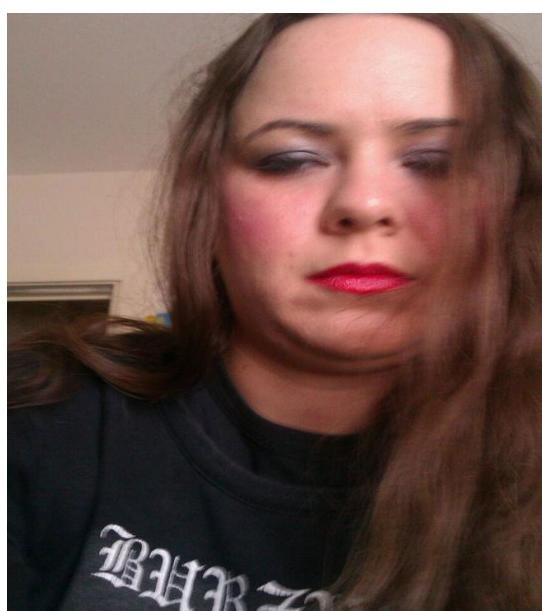
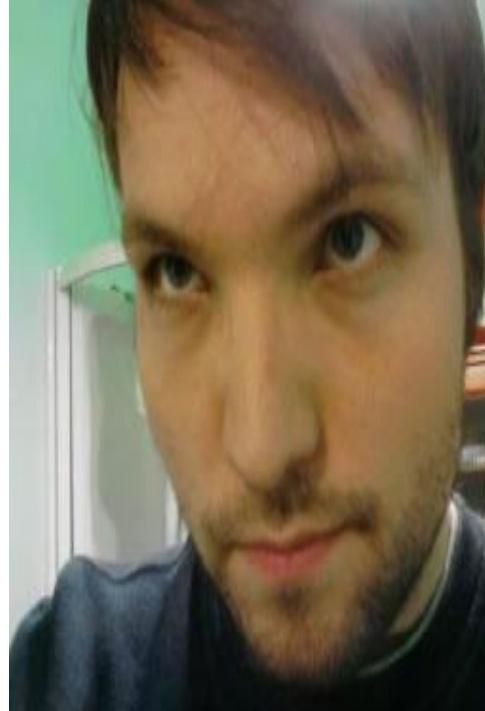
“Yes, Johnny, from this tree. I am going to hang you, just as I have hanged each child in this town. You don’t understand. As I tried to explain to your parents, we don’t want you or your bodies, we only want your souls.”

Fans, Contributors and Freaks: We Love Thee!



From the top: Joseph Bouthiette Jr., Courtney Alsop, Adam Lichi, Jeremy Maddux, David Shepard, Lars Kramhoft, Joe Myers, Adam Cesare, author of "Bound by Jade" review on page 107 and Pedro Silva.

Thank you for saving me from another year of suicide! Happy 2013!



Gothic poetess Brittany Warren, fantabulous surrealist Jeremy C. Shipp, narcoleptic lobotomist Andrew Bock, Danielle Brown, model Itza Jupiter, cyberpunk stock model, Mr. Andrew Guerra, the muscular Joshua Ryan and zombie girl



THE WAITING ROOM

NATHAN WUNNER

The woman sits alone on the floor of an empty white room, chin tucked into her chest and elbows resting on her knees. In her right hand she holds a cigarette, but she doesn't smoke it. Instead she watches as the fire slowly curls and blackens the paper; watches the gray ash drift down to the floor like grimy snowflakes. The woman has shoulder length blonde hair which hides her face from us as she stares down, her eyes searching for patterns in the tile. She wears a simple white button up shirt and a pair of plain white pants; the uniform required of any who enter the waiting room. Management prefers that everyone wear white; makes it easier to see the bloodstains afterwards.

The woman tries not to look at the steel elevator doors to her left, instead choosing to look at the window on the opposite wall. The windows in the waiting room don't open, but even closed you can hear the sounds of the world beyond. A storm rages outside; fat raindrops pound the roof and water streams down the panes of glass, twisting snakes casting veiny black shadows across the pale tile. The wind can't be heard over the rhythm of the rain, but the pressure of it shakes the building and the walls creak and moan under the strain.

The woman sits and stares out that lone window, out into the high gray walls of the city beyond. Green and blue light streams in and casts long, luminescent shadows that seem to dance unnaturally across the floor with a life all their own. Though she stands still, her own shadow stretches and moves from side to side; a silent dancer spinning to music no one can hear.

The screaming begins, from just beyond the elevator doors. The woman is startled at the sound. She realizes her cigarette is now just a smoldering filter, and she hastily grinds it into the floor. Mustering all the energy of someone clinically depressed, she rises and tiptoes on bare feet, moving closer to the window. Blocking the rest of it out. She exhales slowly and leans her forehead against the cool glass. She won't have to wait much longer.

Something pounds on the elevator doors, cries and begs for help. A machine starts up, a saw or a dentist drill. Then there's a wet sound, like a bucket of water thrown onto a linoleum floor.

The woman focuses only on the window. Nothing else matters. She pretends she's underwater somewhere, maybe in a submarine; looking up to the surface and the shimmering lights that spill down into the abyss. Outwardly she still looks as calm as ever, standing upright with her arms folded under her breasts. Her face is calm, expressionless.

Unsympathetic.

The screaming finally ends in a wet gurgle. The elevator doors open slowly, and behind them we see white walls dripping with blood and bits of raw pink gristle. In the center of the elevator stands a pale woman in black robes that run all the way down to the floor, where they gather around her feet. Her head is shaved and smooth, her face thin and sharp; skin stretched tight over jutting shards of bone. Her soft blue eyes lie sunken in their sockets like two pearls floating in the dark waters of a deep well. Upon opening the doors she shivers like someone who has just stepped outside on a cold day. She turns her head slowly and sniffs the air like a blind, cave dwelling beast trying to catch scent of her prey. After a few moments she casts her stare upon the lone window, and the woman in white.

When the woman in black speaks, it is in breathy whispers forced through gritted teeth. "Next, please..." she says before stepping backwards into the elevator. The lights in the waiting room flicker and shut off one by one, leaving the woman in white standing only in the pale light of the window. The rain lets up and everything seems to pause and hold its breath for a moment. Then even the lights in the elevator turn off, and all then can be seen of the woman in black are two pale eyes darting about wildly in the darkness.

The woman in white stares down at the floor, as if in deep thought. Then she takes her first tentative steps toward the elevator doors. She keeps her head low, eyes to the floor, hair still concealing her features from our view.

She steps inside. The elevator doors close behind her. A hint of something, like a flash of steel, is briefly visible in those pale eyes. Some unseen hand closes the window blinds, and the waiting room is plunged into darkness. We can hear screams from just beyond the elevator doors, and the sound of some terrible machine starting up. When the lights come back on, we rise from the floor and walk over to the window.

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ISSUE CREDITS

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Bio: Leonardo Poscia(aka Crazyblacklines) is a self-taught Italian Traditional Artist. Strongly attracted by Horror and Sci-Fi Movies and Comics , couple his artistic training through various forms of language (including Music and Teatro) . Its dearest subjects come from a surreal world that finds inspirations in Dreams,in myths and in human fears(all treaty in allegorical manner).He loves the improvisation and it is pre-

cisely in it that often finds the best solutions and the most interesting ideas. He has collaborated with Contemporary artists, currently participates in art exhibitions, makes artworks on request and continues his studies focused on painting.

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and two for Jamie, the illustrator, his deviantart and online portfolio:

<http://gameofdolls.deviantart.com/>
<http://jchapmanart.daportfolio.com/>

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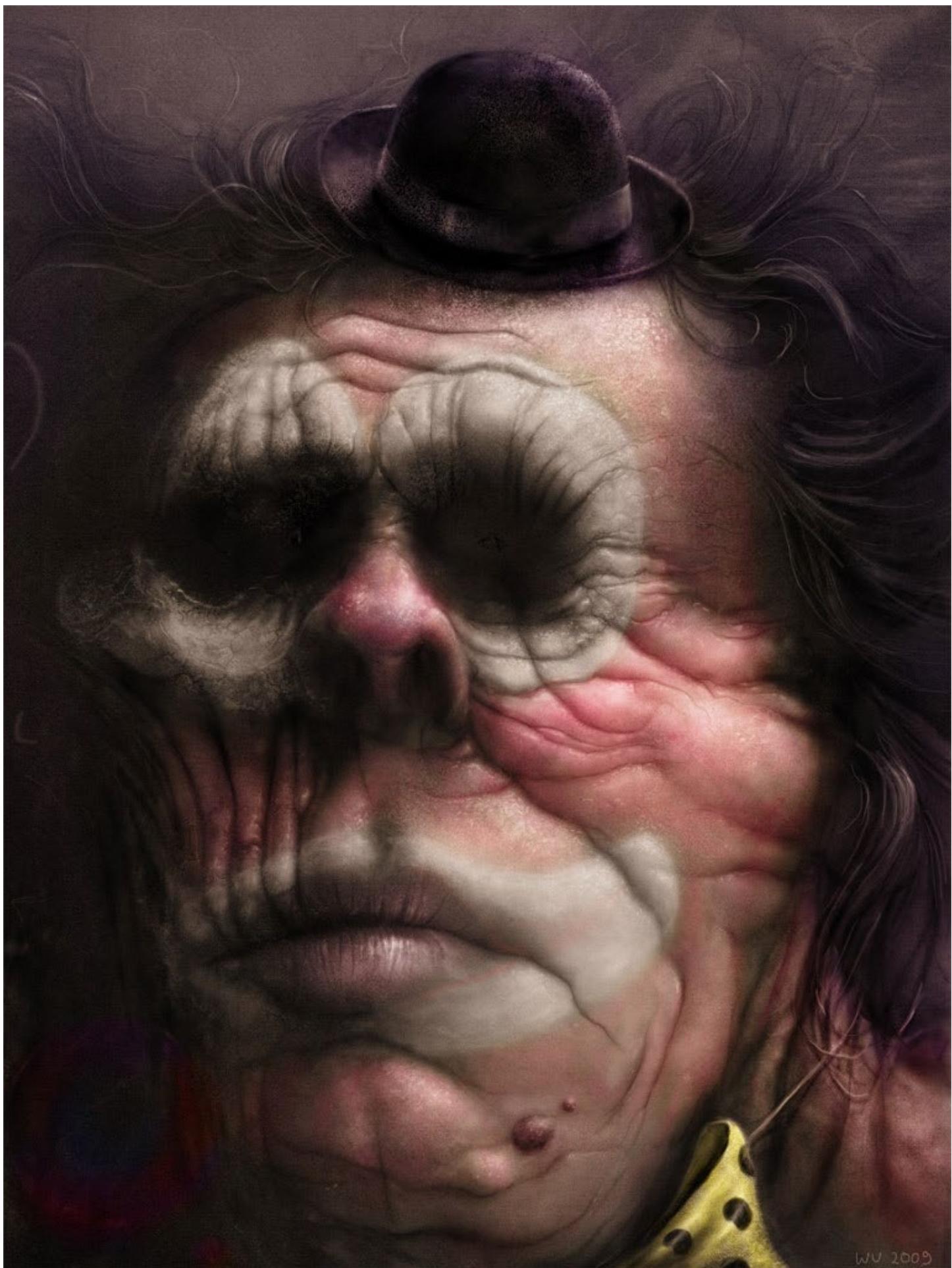
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WU 2009



THE EVIL THAT MEN DO

Part 7

“The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones”. Act 3, Scene II – *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare

Immediately screams and startled calls erupted around the now pitch-black room. The electrical equipment shut down except, curiously, the background noises of whispers that Keith monitored.

“Will someone get a Goddamned flashlight?” Renee shouted.

Keith yelled, “Check the fucking generators! Why did they fail?”

“OW! Damn it, don’t ask me! I’m still trying to find a flashlight!” exclaimed Wilbur.

Annie wailed, “Someone please, turn the lights on! It’s freezing in here and I’m freaking out!”

After what seemed an eternity, the power came back on.

“Finally! Who put back the lights?” Renee ordered.

Keith, the sound effects man, spoke up as he entered the basement from the exterior steps. “I made it outside and checked the generators, but hell, I couldn’t find anything wrong with them. They just went dead. I flipped a switch and they started back up, no problem.”

“And it took you that long to find that out?” a visibly irked Renee demanded.

“Well, no. There was a lot of noise amongst the other slaves in the cages back in the stable. Something really spooked them good. But I was able to calm them down. At least for now.”

Renee was furious. “We haven’t gotten a Goddamned thing done tonight! This is the worst effort ever, people! We better... Keith, turn off that damned background noise, it’s really pissing me off!”

“Renee, it’s BEEN off! All the electronics turn off whenever we lose power.”

Renee looked at Keith uncomprehendingly. “That’s impossible!”

Keith nodded. “Tell me about it.”

“Hold it down, hold it down, people.” Rick said, trying to listen. “Can anyone hear it now?”

Silence. “It’s gone, now.” Carl said.

“Renee, w-what do you want to do now?” Annie asked.

“I want to be finished with this damn video shoot while we’re still young!” she snapped back.

"I know that Renee, but do you want to continue tonight or start over tomorrow?"

Renee sighed heavily, letting it out slowly. "Hell, I don't know." She walked over to where Karen was still kneeling in an elaborate, standing hog-tie, her weary head cast downward. She looked up at Renee's approach. Gazing at Karen for a few seconds Renee roughly pushed her down sideways onto the stone floor with her boot.

"Take five, mousy." Renee sneered. Then she drew up a chair and sat down in it backwards. She crossed her arms horizontally over the backrest and laid her head on them, tired and spent. Suddenly she tensed up before raising her head and looking back at Rick, who was massaging her neck.

"I'll give you just two days to stop that," she said, giving herself over to Rick's deep massage technique. It was his secret weapon. "Or did you come over to admire the view?" Renee smirked. Rick couldn't help but take in her red latex corset, elbow length gloves, and laced stiletto-heel thigh-high boots. But being still bereft of her g-string and cape, and having a bird's eye view of her ample cleavage, he tried to concentrate on something else besides her volcanic sexuality.

Renee secretly enjoyed Rick's predicament. It was cute to her how a grown man would want to resist eye-banging her charms. He cleared his throat and spoke up. "How 'bout after this we get back on track? We still have time to fix up this last shoot, and get in a couple more before dawn. Or if you want, we can stop now, get a little rest, and then kick it back up around noon or so. What do you think?"

While Renee considered, Archie stumbled into the basement down the stairs from the breakfast room. Renee frowned as his unsteady gait told of another bender he'd been on instead of helping with the shoot as he was told. She rubbed her tired eyes with frustration. 'God, what am I to do with people like this?' she thought. 'The bastard was probably the source of the slaves' terror, the way he abuses them. That does it. He's gone as soon as this shoot is over. Luckily the on-premises graveyard has plenty of empty plots left over.' She looked over her shoulder at Rick and managed a wan smile for him.

"Ok, Mister Hands, we'll keep on keepin' on as long as we have the energy tonight. Check all the equipment again; we don't want another breakdown like that when it's getting good. And," she nodded her head at Archie, "keep an eye on him, ok? He's been in the bottle again, so stop him if he starts to go overboard, got it?" Rick looked over and nodded. "Leave it to me, boss."

Renee looked over at Kent upside down on the St. Andrews Cross and Karen laying on her side in her hogtie, her mind considering either finishing what she started or trying something different. It would be a shame to lose what footage they had. Nodding, she made up her mind and stood up.

"Ok, listen up, people! We're going to finish this one set, but with a few changes to the script. Carl, see if you can help Archie into his demon suit without him pissing himself. Cyndi Beth, bring the wifey over here in front of her loyal hubby when the shoot starts. I think we still might be able to have some more fun with them. Get the equipment checked and move it! Let's go people, chop, chop!" As Rick gave Renee a comforting pat on her back with his hand, Renee turned and clasped it.

"Rick," she said, rather chagrined, "look, I'm sorry I've been a real cast iron bitch lately, but the slave cartel's been on my ass lately for videos, and I've got to finish this one ASAP." Rick nodded and smiled. "Not to worry, Renee. We'll finish this tonight or tomorrow night at the latest." He began to walk away but Renee continued to hold his hand. He stopped and looked at her curiously.

"Rick, how do you account for the whispers we heard, the ones that went on after the sound went out

with the rest of the equipment?"

Rick considered. "To be honest, I don't know. Might be anything. The wind, bats, squirrels..."

"Lions and tigers and bears, oh my." Renee snorted. It was the first sign of relaxation the two of them felt in a while. Renee stepped forward and gave Rick a momentary hug and kiss, patting his jaw and its neatly trimmed salt and pepper beard before turning away to observe the crew get ready for the next phase of the shoot. Rick grinned and headed back to check his camera.

Finally, the crew was at their equipment as Renee took a quick look around. Then she motioned for Carl and Archie to take up positions on either side of Kent. Rick looked around before returning his gaze to Renee, giving her the thumbs-up sign. Renee gave a noticeable nod with her head and everyone switched on again. The shoot was back on, centering on Renee and Kent at the cross.

"Action!" Renee called. As her people began moving in earnest, Renee chuckled to herself as she looked at Karen being dragged near the base of the St. Andrews Cross. Left painfully upright, the skin burns from the stone floor had inflamed her knees' surface and coated them with a gummy texture. Karen shuddered at her wretchedness and hung her head in defeat. Cyndi Beth stood nearby, waiting.

Renee walked over to her and lifted her chin with her riding crop. Tears streaked her dirty face, and drool continued to drip from her ball gag. Karen's red, swollen eyes sought any sign of mercy in Renee's features. She found none. Karen closed her eyes and continued to weep softly. Renee released her chin and reached behind to unlock her ball gag, letting it drop to the floor.

"You know something, sweetheart, you two really are a piece of work," she said, as she stood next to Karen, her shaved sex inches from her face. "You give up so easily, whining and crying all the time. Damn, I have slugs in my backyard with more spine than you. But, we'll see if I can grow one for you." Producing a key from inside her cleavage she unlocked her shackles before untying the ropes around her wrists and where they met at her ankles. She then retied her wrists in front of her and secured the loose ends upwards at an angle around Kent's penis and testicles, tying the knot taut.

Satisfied, she gave his testicles a hard, long squeeze, forcing an anguished shout from Kent. Renee looked at the two at her mercy and licked her lips forebodingly. She shuddered involuntarily, a familiar and perverse shadow awakening in her by the realization of the total power she held over her two slaves. Salivating, she walked over to an open iron box, and began rummaging around in it briefly. Then she looked over her shoulder, smiling malevolently. Turning, she began walking back toward the helpless pair whom had their eyes centered on her and the thin rattan cane she carried in her hands.

Taking several swipes through the air, the cane made a shrill sound with each motion. When it cut through the air, her two captives flinched in bone-chilling fear. "Well, dearest wifey, what do you think of your faithful hubby now? I don't know if he ever ate you out, but damn, that was about the best I've ever felt in my life! He sure knows how to give a woman a good tongue lashing, if you'll pardon the pun." Renee jeered evilly. Karen bent her head further and her sobbing increased.

Renee stood looking down on Karen. Then with a full, wound-up motion brought the cane around and down hard across her shoulders, a few inches below her neck. There was a dull clicking sound of the rattan across her flesh, and Karen's head jerked upward, her eyes wide and filled with terror as her high-pitched shriek echoed throughout the basement. Jerking her hands backwards spasmodically, the cords around Kent's manhood were yanked involuntarily, and his tortured yells joined Karen's.

"I asked you a question, bitch! What do you think of your worm of a husband?" Renee blared down at her. But Karen couldn't even gather her breath at the moment. The horrid sting of the cane burned into her brain, leaving a long, red and swollen welt on her back. All she could do was bury her face in her arms and sob mightily. Karen's misery was just starting, and Renee's joy was beginning.

"My, my, you *ARE* a difficult slave, aren't you? Doesn't even want to answer a simple question from her Mistress. Well, Miss Mouse, I suppose we'll have to do it the hard way, wonderfully enough." Renee's laughter was frightening to hear. But it was soon drowned out by the whipsaw sound of the cane hissing like a snake again and again, followed closely by Karen's piercing howls and Kent's gasps. On it went, the minutes dragging on for the helpless two as they suffered Renee's hellish torment. Only after over three-dozen lashes up and down Karen's back ended with Renee's cane shattering did the punishment abate momentarily. Renee gazed upon Karen's misery with demented satisfaction. Karen's back was a bleeding criss-cross quilt of crimson, enflamed flesh from the caning. Throwing the useless cane to one side, she jogged back to the iron box, this time returning with four more of the hellish rods.

"Let's see, my darling, where were we? Oh, yes, I remember now..." Dropping all but a cane longer than the one she used before, Renee targeted Karen's unblemished ass. The horrible whistle of the stick began and Karen and Kent's roars and groans reverberated in the basement anew. Renee's crew were spellbound at what was unfolding before them. They had never seen Renee this determined before.

Renee was in heaven. Here was her slave, right where she wanted her, helpless and vulnerable. The added pleasure of Kent's suffering fueled her desires for ever-increasing torture with every blow she gave Karen, whose voice was turning hoarse from her cries. The pinkish flesh of her ass soon disappeared under a corrugated row of deep red scars, swelling with each stroke. Again another cane fell into ruin. Again an exultant Renee grabbed another and began anew on Karen's ass. Soon there was hardly an unblemished area of flesh remaining. But it didn't stop Renee. Switching targets, she aimed for Karen's breasts and stomach, unleashing another barrage upon her helpless body. Karen's screams intensified as never before as the cane began to leave its hideous tattoo upon her tender flesh. Renee eagerly feasted upon Karen's suffering, a dark, eerie force rising inside of her, beckoning, demanding, and insatiable. She became consumed by the need to glut herself on her slaves ruin, and the only sustenance it would accept was to inflict more and more brutal, horrendous abuse.

Rick exchanged glances with the rest of the crew. Everyone was in shock at Renee's assailing of Karen's helpless body. Renee, delirious with Karen's agony and desperate to drag more out of her, threw away her last useless cane and began to run back to the iron box. Rick motioned to the crew to keep filming and then met Renee at the box. She seemed to be feverishly looking for something.

"Renee, what is it, are you all right?" Renee didn't seem to hear Rick as she reached in the box and grabbed a sinewy, leather implement. Rick seized her hand. "A bullwhip? Good God, Renee, are you trying to kill her? What the hell are you..." With a bestial snarl Renee jerked her hand free and swung the whip around and aimed at Rick's head, barely missing due to his quick reflexes.

"Who the hell do you think you're talking to?" bellowed Renee at Rick's intervention attempt. "Get your ass back to your camera before you get the same!" she threatened, whip held at the ready. Like a junkie denied their drug, Renee was not to be stymied and would do what she needed for her fix.

Rick quickly backpedaled, transfixed with Renee's inexplicable attitude. Just a half hour ago the two of them were exchanging pleasantries, but now her whole personality was in some sort of voracious hunger to ravage Karen's body with excruciating sadism. She had always insisted everyone be in control of themselves at all times. But now she looked for all the world to be insane. Bewildered, he slowly sat down at his desk, but was determined to stop the shoot if necessary. Opening his desk drawer he drew out his automatic pistol and

checked to make sure it was loaded. The crew exchanged worried glances.

Ignoring everyone, Renee looked back into the iron box and feverishly pulled out a telescoping spreader bar and more coils of rope. She almost sprinted back to where Karen and Kent were, who were now watching with trepidation Renee's newfound lust for their torment. She motioned for Carl and Archie to join her, leaving Cyndi Beth at Kent's side hanging on the cross.

"Get her ready for some suspension treatment. I hear it's very good for the spine, if she has one, that is." Renee quipped. Carl and Archie grinned and tied a knot through rings on either end of the spreader bar with reinforced polyester cord. Boosting each other up, the ends of the polycord were slipped into large iron rings set in the ceiling. The ends were then drawn back down to lie on the floor. All the while Karen and Kent were watching in dread apprehension.

"Ok, untie the wifey's legs and prepare to give her a free yoga session, why don't you?" Renee taunted. Karen made the foolish mistake of attempting to resist their efforts by trying to scuttle away, which only succeeded in yanking the ropes firmly tied to Kent's genitalia. His yelps of pain made Karen stop immediately, and allowed an amused Carl and Archie to easily capture her. They untied her wrists and ignored her pathetic efforts to fight them off as they forced her hands behind her back and shackled them together securely. Carried struggling back to where the spreader bar lay for her, she was dumped unceremoniously on the stone floor. While Carl and Archie began unraveling the ropes that bound her legs, Renee walked up and sat down on Karen's breasts, a malicious gleam in her eyes.

"Well, my little vixen, wondering what's going to happen next?" Renee purred. "What's the matter, cat's got your tongue, oh mousy one? That's a shame, 'cause all this action has made my muff absolutely dripping with excitement. Mind if you'd lick it dry for me? I'm sure your hubby would love to see it." Renee sneered, looking over her shoulder at Kent, whose eyes were trained on both of them.

"No! I'm not going to do that for you or anyone! I don't do that sort of thing, and I'm never... mmnnppphhh!" Renee had suddenly slid forward and pushed her sex into Karen's mouth, holding her head up in place with her hands and her thighs, tight as in a vise. Karen wriggled and made garbled sounds while buried in Renee's vagina, who teasingly pinched her nose shut.

"Geh uurr thun ow uff mwy mowf!" Karen whimpered, struggling without success. "Awww, come on, you can do better than that! Here, shall I show you how it's done?" Renee released her grip on Karen, allowing her to gasp for air. She then lay on her side leering at Karen lasciviously before pointing her boot at the spreader bar. When Karen saw this, she began to struggle weakly, but with two adult males on each foot, it was useless. Carl and Archie easily wrangled Karen's ankles into a manacle on each end of the bar, and eagerly awaited Renee's command. She looked at Karen smugly and said, "Last chance! Sure you don't want to give me what I want?" she inquired, masturbating.

"No! I'm never going to... do that!" Karen snapped back at Renee.

Renee's laughter was like the mocking call of crows. "Do *that*? Are you kidding me? You've never eaten out another woman, not even a little exploratory taste of yourself when you were a girl?" Renee removed her fingers from herself and then held them out to Karen's mouth, who shut her eyes and turned her head away as far as she could. "Stop that, get those away from me!" Karen said, repulsed by the gesture. Renee ridiculed Karen's response. "What do you think of that, boys?" she asked derisively.

Carl and Archie scoffed. "I think she's lying, or if not, could use a good lesson from you." Carl replied. "Aye," Archie added, "And one to remind the *'berk' she needs to call you Mistress, she does!"

"Well, there's a good way to find out if she's lying" Renee jested. "First, let's let her have a nice stretch of the legs, ok? Good exercise, so I hear. Make a wish, boys!"

With that, Carl and Archie each took one of Karen's feet and forcefully drew them away from each other as far as they could on the spreader bar, extending her legs to an exceedingly uncomfortable distance from each other. Gasping, Karen writhed wretchedly as the bar was locked into place. Karen tried as hard as she could to free herself but her legs were stuck in an abysmal leg strain. Lastly, the rope binding her hands was tied firmly to the middle of the spreader bar.

"Well done, my good devils! Now, let's see how she really feels about a tongue going where one's never gone before." Renee rolled over between Karen's woefully stretched legs and placed her hands under her buttocks. Then she coyly began to run her tongue along the edges of her vulva, glancing up devilishly to get Karen's reaction.

Karen flinched as she felt Renee's experienced tongue trace her vulva. Her eyes shut and tensed her body, then tried to inch away from Renee by arching her back and moving like an inchworm backwards, despite the agony her caned back and ass felt. Suddenly Karen's motion was stopped when her shoulders ran into an immovable object. Looking up she saw a leering Archie standing over her, his legs and feet trapping and holding her in place. She laid down in defeat, shutting her eyes. But her head soon began to flip back and forth on the stone floor and her groin began to squirm when Renee switched to her labia. She arched her back forward to watch Renee and froze. Cold and evil her eyes looked, and they seemed to pierce her very soul. She fell back, panting quickly, and Renee felt Karen's clitoris begin to swell. Her vaginal lips became swollen, followed swiftly by her vagina ballooning upward. Her buttocks and thighs became tight and stiff under Renee's hands and her entire body tried to arch upward from the floor. Renee felt Karen's contractions beneath her tongue and knew she was about to cum.

"Stop it! Stop!" Karen moaned aloud, eyes screwed shut. "This is wrong... what you're doing! Don't... don't... make me... 'Ing'... 'Ung!' No! NO! 'Uuuuhhh!' Don't! Please... don't!"

Renee looked at her incredulously. "Don't? This is wrong? Oh, my God, you've never had an orgasm in your life?" Renee joined in the hilarity echoing throughout the basement. "You want me to stop, 'Pollyanna'? You seem to be enjoying this quite a bit. And you also seem to have forgotten that you don't call the shots around here." She sought Karen's clitoris and bit it, holding on with her incisors. Karen shrieked, her torso bending off the floor. Renee looked back at Kent on the cross; who was gazing transfixed at them. She also saw the huge erection he had sprouted. Cyndi Beth had also noticed it, and began slowly milking his shaft with her hand, making him groan from time to time against his will. "See? Even your faithful hubby loves the show I'm giving for you both! Bet he never knew what a screamer you really are. So what will it be, I give you what your man never gave you or not?"

Karen lay back on the floor, her heavy breathing continuing unabated. When she didn't answer, Renee gave her a stinging bite down hard on her labia, eliciting an anguished shout from her.

"Sooner or later you're going to learn when I ask a question I expect an answer, 'Virgin Mary'. Now, let's start again, shall we? Do you want me to continue or not?" Karen just shook her head.

Renee stood up and sighed. "Well, I gave her a chance. Up and away, boys." Carl and Archie each took an end of the ropes hanging down and started to pull, slowly lifting Karen up in the air, heels first. After her body reached the point where her head dangled a foot or so from the floor, each end was tied off to an escutcheon on an archway in the basement. Karen looked all around her in fright as she slowly swung back and

forth. Then Renee walked to her and kneeled down, almost face to face with her.

"Hello down there!" she said mockingly, giving Karen's nose a pinch. "Changed your mind, perhaps? Or are you going to continue your foolish resistance?" Renee looked over to Rick at his table running his camera, where he gave her the thumbs up. He was feeling better about Renee. She just must have gotten carried away with herself, he mused.

"No answer, eh? Well, I guess that is an answer, in a way. Regardless, I still get to have my fun now, and in the end, you will dine on my pussy, for as long as I want." Renee's smile was fearful to behold. "Get ready for some real pain this time, sweetie" she said, wrapping the bullwhip around Karen's neck and tightening it until her face turned red. "Oh, my God..." Karen let escape her lips.

Then Kent finally found his voice. "For God's sake, hon, do what she asks! She's crazy!"

"Changed your mind? Well, Mr. Faithful is right. I am crazy, for your screams, your fright, and your blood, and now it's too late. You had your chance, but now it's fun time. My fun." Renee sneered.

She took another length of rope and wrapped it several times around Karen's neck, tying it finally with a firm but not constrictive knot. Then she grabbed a cinder block lying on the floor nearby and placed it underneath Karen. After turning her swaying captive into a position facing the cameras, she tied the end of the rope from her neck firmly to the cinder block to hold her in place for the cameras. Then she stood back to admire her work, the result being Karen's face turning red by the constriction of the rope and hanging inverted. Frowning, she approached Karen, her eyes locked on her vulva. She reached out and gently rolled a swath of her public hair between her thumb and forefinger.

"My hired help has been slacking I see. I like my slaves' shaved, not growing this... boxwood shrub," she giggled at her pun. "Luckily, I have the means at hand to fix this." Renee unwrapped the bullwhip from Karen's neck and held it to her face, smiling at her growing horror.

"Oh, no, you wouldn't, you couldn't! Not... there! You'll tear me to ribbons! Please don't!"

For an answer, Renee grinned, paced off a few strides, and began swinging the whip overhead before giving it a crack, getting the feel of it again. "See? Just like riding a bicycle, you never forget. Except a bicycle won't strip bits of flesh from your sweet little muffin a little piece at a time, savvy?"

"PLEASE NO! I'll... I'll do what you want! I'll... kiss you... down there! Just please don't..."

Ignoring her pleas, Renee lashed out on her first strike at Karen. Her strike was off about two inches above and to the right of her target. The horrid crack of the whip broke the sound barrier, causing Karen's piercing cry to erupt but leaving her otherwise unhurt.

"Oh, come on, you big baby. I haven't even gotten close yet. And you better remain more still than that or I will 'accidentally' strike you for real, understand?"

"Please don't, Renee, please, please, please don't!" Karen began to sob uncontrollably.

"Jesus Christ, bitch, what's it going to be next, pretty please with sugar on top? God, what a blubbering baby you are! And you're forgetting my title again, aren't you? Well, I'll just have to show you how good I really am. But, to keep you from freaking out any more I'll have to keep you from looking, I guess." Renee motioned for Archie to blindfold Karen.

"There, there, now **cuddle and kiss, don't you worry, Renee's the best with a whip ever, she is! She'll ***rant and rave your ****grumble and grunt smooth as a baby's rump in no time, she will!" he said, strapping the blindfold on despite her cries and struggling.

"Ok, darling, on with the show! Here we go! Say goodbye to your pubes or your pussy, one or the other!" With a knowing wink to her crew she wound up for the first strike at a terrified Karen.

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Cockney rhyming slang is often used as a substitute for words regarded as taboo. *"Berk" (often used to mean "foolish person") originated from the most famous of all fox hunts, the "Berkeley Hunt" meaning "cunt". **"cuddle and kiss" means miss, a young girl. ***"rant and rave" means to shave. ****"grumble and grunt" refers to the vagina.

Everyone Loves a Zombie Apocalypse



Art by Anthony Synder







JIM AND ME

REBECCA COMERUEDA

I guess I wasn't as good as I thought I was. Growing up, I always had this fluffy white dream of a wedding; with doves and a man with soft eyes telling me he loves me. Maybe things didn't turn out the way I planned, but for a while I thought we could be happy. I thought we had a chance.

James and I met when I was seventeen and he was twenty. Within a week, I was calling him Jim. By the time I was nineteen, we had been married for months. I was young, and I was, well honestly I was damn pretty. I was a young woman, even if I was still a teenager, and something about that really bothered Jim. I try not to think about it much, because the implications make me a little sick to my stomach. I made up for my age by being completely, emotionally and physically, dependent on my husband. Jim bought the groceries, Jim worked and I stayed home, and I didn't talk to anybody but Jim. I never had the sanity of mind to miss my mother and father.

I had dreams of that white wedding. I had dreams of being a little girl, the way Jim wished I were, and wanting the man with soft eyes and finding Jim. I would wake up cold and crying. Alone in a single person bed.

If I had a dollar for every time Jim told me he loves me, I'd be poorer than I already was. Maybe I wasn't poor exactly, but the weekly spending budget Jim put me on wasn't fit for a street urchin, much less his young bride. I would have liked to wear a dress, just once. Maybe a red one, one that's long and backless, with a train trailing out behind me that could stop heartbeats. I know though, if I had the choice, I would always choose the wedding dress.

Jim, somehow, started talking to me even less. He actually never talked to me before, but somehow, it's like on a scale of zero to ten, the words he shared with me were in the negatives. He wouldn't even look at me. In the back of my mind it registered that it was my twentieth birthday.

Jim left me that night.

I can't really remember doing much of anything during the week that he was gone. Not that I don't remember that week, I just can't remember actually doing anything when Jim wasn't there. I don't even remember eating. I was in some kind of a trance, even though I was out of my mind with panicked horror. I didn't want freedom. I wanted Jim back, whether he loved me or not.

I dreamt I was pregnant. I dreamt I was in a white wedding dress, with jewels and a train. I dreamt I was in a white wedding dress with jewels and a train, and I was pregnant, and blood was running down my legs.

Luckily, amazingly, Jim came back. The first thing he did was ask me if I had been eating. I shook my head, and he touched his forehead to mine. He made his confession in a voice, soft like a sigh. He loved me. He loved me, and he was sorry. And for a moment, I was a queen.

We slept in the same bed that night.

It didn't matter how softly he touched me, I would wake up the next morning sore and bruised. He pressed his nose to my stomach one night and took a deep breath. When he looked back up at me, I thought he might cry. "You're pregnant." He stated so surely. "You're pregnant. I can tell. You're going to have my child." I wanted to ask him how he could know that, but he pressed his finger to my lips and smiled. I knew then, that this was a different man than the one I had married. And I was happy. I was young, but for the first time, I had a husband who loved me. I fell asleep shortly after, with Jim's hand squeezing mine.

I woke in shivers. My husband was gone from my bed, and I remembered the very long seasons of waking up alone. I got up far too quickly for my sleep-fogged body to comprehend and almost fell half a dozen times on my way down the stairs. "Baby? You down here?" The lights on in the kitchen flickered. A soft voice answered me. A soft voice answered me, but it was not Jim's voice. It occurred to me that I probably hadn't have actually spoken to my husband in months, maybe even a year. Its voice was soft, although its red eyes were burning. Its voice was soft, although its skin was rough with scales and scars. Its voice was soft; the blood on its tongue did nothing to dirty the sound. Below it, Jim's bones. Below it, Jim's skin. "Come to bed love." I murmured, tracing my stomach with one finger. I saw it smile once before I retreated up the stairs.



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